HE LOVE OF LONG AGO

AND OTHER STORIES

BY

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THE LOVE OF LONG AGO

EVERYBODY in the world, young and old, has, at one time or another, heard or read of that sweet and bitter, gentle and fierce emotion called love. All the most beautiful stories and poems have love for their centre—love as their crowning theme. Poetic idylls of lovers whose truth and constancy have outweighed all the world's wealth and glory make up the best and most entrancing half of each nation's literature, yet—looking round upon the modes, manners, and customs of the present day—we can but wonder whether, after all, love is such a real thing with us as it seems to have been with our forefathers. Or whether all the exquisite songs and romances on the subject are merely imaginative rhapsodies upon the unattainable—expressions of the vague consciousness of a glamour which dazzles the senses like a passing flare of unexpected light in darkness, and then passes, to return no more. But, glamour or no, we still pore over all that tells us of its power and witchery, and our sympathies are more with Tristan and Iseult,

Romeo and Juliet, than with the hero of a hundred battles. We know that Nelson won Trafalgar, but his "God bless my beloved Emma!" goes home to us even more keenly than his victory. We respond at once, and with a strange eagerness, to the confession of the heroine of "Elle et Lui"—"J'offre à Dieu pour toi le sacrifice de ma vie! Dieu me pardonnera un dévouement inutile, lui qui sait combien il est sincere!"

I had been dreaming about this sentiment of love—love such as one reads of in poetry but seldom experiences in reality, and in the dream—a waking reverie, encouraged by idly swinging in a hammock under the trees one summer afternoon, I suddenly bethought me of an old escritoire full of papers which had recently been left to me in a will by a relative whom I had never seen. It was a fine old piece of furniture of the time of Charles II, and its contents, so I had been told, were likely to interest me on account of sundry letters and documents having to do with certain members of my family.

On such a "lazy day" as the one I speak of, when the very sunshine, birds, and flowers seemed all to combine against my doing anything with the time save to pass it as suited my own whim, it occurred to me that it might be amusing to look through these old papers and see if there

was anything of historic or literary value among them.

Deserting my hammock for the moment, I ran indoors and unlocked the old desk for the first time since it had come into my possession. A musty odour of worm-eaten wood mixed with the sweeter perfume of dried rose-leaves and lavender floated out on the air as I took up the first bundle of documents that came to my hand, and, returning to the garden once more, I again settled myself comfortably in the hammock and began to examine the records I held.

Letters there were from dear, dead people, breathing of tenderness and trust—of affection promising to be "eternal"—alas! letters written by hands long ago turned to dust, or shall we say to flowers? For I never see the wood anemones and wild lilies springing up through the dark earth without a fancy that they may have some remote association with the little white hands of girls and children who died in ages past, and who seek to remind us that they once lived, by pushing these mute blossoming appeals of love up to us above their graves. Nothing is sadder than to read old letters, and I soon found my eyes full of tears for the griefs of departed men and women unknown to me. What matters it whether the pen that writes is of the time of Charles II or Edward VII? The same heart

pulsates through humanity always in all periods, submitting to no greater sovereign power than Destiny.

Setting aside for later perusal a small sealed bundle of documents marked "Concerning His Majesty's (Charles II) Escape to France, 1651," I came upon several folded sheets of paper, yellow with antiquity, and tied together with a tarnished silver ribbon. This was inscribed in a fine and delicate handwriting: "The Secret of my Single Life. Wherein is set forth the reason why I, Marjorie Lesley, have remained unmarried, so that if question be made thereof, no courteous and gallant gentleman shall ever suppose it to be from any want of humbleness, respect, or gratitude towards his gentleness for ladies, but solely for that God in His great mercy hath willed me to be true."

This quaint wording fascinated me, and I untied and opened the packet, being careful not to tear the flimsy papers, which were worn and brittle with age. They were covered with fine writing, and, after some little time and study, I became gradually accustomed to the close yet flowing caligraphy, and I soon found myself absorbed in the story of a girl's first love set down by her own hand nearly three hundred years ago. I transcribe it here for modern readers, not because I have any idea that it will

touch their hearts or move their senses to any particularly tender or sympathetic emotion, but only for the reason that the tone, temper, and spirit of its writer are in such direct opposition to the ways of modern girls and women, that from this fact alone it is somewhat of a curiosity. It began very simply, and was throughout expressed with that directness which always accompanies the utterances of truth from the heart.

Thus it ran:

THE STORY OF MY BETROTHAL

Whereas it often chances that after the death of persons their deeds may be misrepresented, or the manner of their lives called in question by those who, coming after them, truly know nothing of the causes of their private conduct, I think it good to here set down in all plainness and with honesty the reasons whereof I have avoided the estate of honoured and honourable marriage. For such estate is, I know full well, heartily to be desired by every true woman, provided that her spoken vows before the altar of God are sincerely in keeping with such true love in her heart as shall find but poor expression in language. But if it should so chance that she hath pledged her maiden troth to one who by God's will hath been suddenly separated from her

by death, then surely it behoves her to remember that whereas this death is but a matter of brief parting or division between this world and the next, she is not loyal to herself if she do not faithfully hold to her own vows beyond the vanishing things of time and space, and so prepare for her eternal union with him to whom her soul hath been wedded in its first pure faith. Mayhap these grave thoughts are but ill expressed, for I have no skill in writing, and am ever slow to find right words for deep feeling, and even in speech I have always been fearful of myself lest by saying too little I should seem indifferent, or by saying too much I should unwittingly offend by my over-boldness.

I have not been trained in such arts as may be learned by the culture of society in high places, inasmuch as from my earliest youth up I dwelt apart from all crowded resorts, and as the only daughter of my parents, remained with them always, subservient to their good wishes and command.

And looking back from my age now, to the time of my seventeenth year, I can never regret that till then I dwelt in ignorance of all save very simple things, and that I found sufficient joy in the gracious beauties of Nature by which our home among the woods and hills was well surrounded. Old as I am, I do not forget, and till my eyes close in their last

sleep I shall always see in my mind the beloved home of my fathers as it stood in my young days, on a fair rising ground of greensward, showing its red brick turrets and gables among the plumy foliage of many trees, and decked in all its many courts and alleys with sweetly-odorous flowers.

No more pleasant place of happy retreat was ever made for peaceful dwelling in ; and here I was born, and here I passed the growing-time of life in gladness as unconscious as the gladness of a flower in the grass, or a bird that sings without knowing why its heart is full of melody.

Here came the friends of my childhood, and the kindly neighbours who honoured my parents for their noble worth and good renown—and little cause had I to long for things I knew not of, or dream of fairer scenes than this of my home which always was to me most fair.

Far away from any town were we, and little news could we hear of the wider ways of men, for truly our hands were full of our own concerns, and our days were passed in tending the wants of the poor about our gates, and relieving such of the sick and hungry as came to us for help and comfort. And for myself, I thought of nothing save the sunshine and the joy of life, and the love of my parents, and all my care was to be ready to assist the sorrowful and lonely who had no such ease of mind or

body as, by God's mercy, I was permitted then to possess.

Many I have known who would perchance have judged the manner in which I spent the time as solitary, and lacking pastime, though truly this was not so at all. I was in all ways happy, and envied not those maidens of my own age who, travelling by coach to London, saw wondrous things which sorely bewildered them, and, to my humble thinking, rendered them less contented than if they had remained at home.

Now and again some noble did visit us that had seen great cities and spoken much with the dwellers therein; and very marvellous to me have always seemed the descriptions of what are common customs in that great world of wickedness, which I, for my part, have never desired to behold.

But all this concerneth not what I have to write of, inasmuch as the best life is not the life of worldly manners. And truly methinks there is but one life for women, and that is love. For when love comes to a maiden's heart, then for the first time she lives; and when love departs that life is over, and she is but the ghost of herself, living upon the past memory of sweetness, as myself witnesseth. So here let me, while I am able, testify to the noble qualities and surpassing virtues of that excellent and courteous gentleman whose faith and honour are mine to cherish

till I die, and to whom I hope to present myself in pure loyalty beyond the portals of the grave.

It was the sweetest season of the year when first we met; a tender April was passing into a fair May; and it was an afternoon full of sunshine and singing when my father returned from the hunt with the gallant George Percy by his side. I see him now as I saw him then, a noble figure of a man, with a brave and open countenance which seemed to reflect the brightness of the spring sunlight, so pleasing was the smile with which he gave us greeting as he, with my father, drew bridle-rein at our door.

"Hasten, Marjorie," said my father, "hasten to thy mother, and tell her that this gentleman hath agreed to honour our poor dwelling for some brief days. Bring the silver flagon of wine to the small library, and the cups belonging, and serve it thyself, Marjorie, for we are faint with thirst, and thou art nimble-footed."

I hastened to perform my father's bidding, while he assisted his guest to dismount; and as soon as I beheld the men-servants leading the horses away through the courtyard, I placed the silver flagon and cups on a salver, and went swiftly to the library, where I stood in the presence of my father and the noble Percy, waiting their good pleasure.

"Nay, then," said Percy—"nay, then, fair

Marjorie, if such be thy sweetest of names—suffer me, I pray thee, to relieve thee of thy weighty burden!" And bowing low before me, he took the salver from my hand and placed it on the table. "Now," he continued, addressing my father, with that sunniest of smiles which hath always remained in my remembrance, "come, Sir Reginald; let us drain a stoup of wine to thy fair daughter's health, if she will permit us thus much rough liberty with her name——"

"Certes, the wench should be proud of the distinction," replied my father. "Come hither, Marjorie, and spare thy blushes for a more fitting occasion. Now, George Percy, thy toast!"

"To Marjorie Lesley, the fairest of her sex!" he answered gaily, turning to me and saluting me with so much gentle graciousness that I felt well-nigh overcome with confusion, and was right glad to escape from the room and get me to my own chamber, from which privacy I was, however, too soon called by my lady mother, who placed to my care sundry household matters concerning the comfort of our guest, which I made haste to dispatch with mine utmost care.

Now it is not possible that I, so unlearned and unskilled in writing, should be able to tell in suitable words how, from day to day, the presence of the noble Percy became more and more necessary to

my peace of mind and happiness, though truly my mother and I saw little of him, for all the day he rode out apparently in urgent haste, and on his return in the evening remained most of the time with my father talking in the private library with shut doors. And my mother once said to me:

"Truly, I think this gentleman hath some secret service to perform for the King!"

At which words my blood seemed to freeze slowly within me, and I stood for some moments as one that is struck suddenly dumb. For though we had not seen much trouble in our retired part of the country, still, the rumoured distractions of the kingdom had not failed to reach us—and it had sorely grieved us to know that his Sacred Majesty King Charles was hunted like a noble stag from place to place by his lawless enemies; and my father, a staunch and loyal Cavalier, often prayed that his Majesty might honour our abode by his presence, in order that he might shelter him if need be, and personally defend him at the risk of his own life. All of which heroic loyalty in my good father I revered deeply, yet for myself I cannot say that I had ever shared his wishes regarding the King, for I am of a feeble and timid disposition and love the quiet of peace. Therefore, when my lady mother said, "I think this gentleman hath secret service for the King," I grew amazed with terror, for well I

knew that secret service meant danger and often death to him therein engaged. And so it happened that I began to look more earnestly than heretofore at the noble Percy, and my voice faltered foolishly when I spoke, so that a time came when he approached me unobserved, and said:

"Thou art troubled, fair Marjorie! Thy cheeks are paler than they were wont to be, and thy sweet voice hath lost its merry ring. Tell me, gentle lady, if I, unworthy as I am, have caused thee annoy, for I am willing to atone to the utmost for any fault I have unwittingly committed; only smile and assure me that I do not leave thee without a full pardon!"

"Alas, sir," said I, "dost thou talk of leaving us?"

And I could utter no more for the strange sickness that oppressed my heart.

"Yea, that do I," he answered me, his eyes flashing proudly as he laid his hand on his sword-hilt; "and thou, the worthy daughter of a worthy sire, wilt bless my going, and say God-speed! For know, fair Marjorie, the King passes through the neighbouring forest to-morrow night, and I, with a chosen band of Cavaliers, go to meet and escort him to the nearest port. But ere I leave thee"—and he stopped abruptly and his voice sank lower—"were it not for the hazardous errand on which I am bound, I should speak of what concerneth me

deeply, but that I fear to risk thy displeasure—what, tears!—weeping, dear one!—and I the cause?"

Truly, my tears fell fast in spite of myself, and, hearing my father's footstep on the outer stair, I rose, sorely ashamed, and scarce knowing what I did, hurried from the room and betook myself to the private oratory within our house, and there falling on my knees, I wept long and sore. Alone, I prayed for strength and resignation, and as I raised my weeping eyes to the figure of our dear Lord Christ upon the cruel cross, the patient, suffering countenance seemed to wear a smile. Some words that I had once read came back to me: "Whoso loveth must willingly embrace all that is hard and bitter for the sake of the beloved!" And so, repeating this phrase again and again for my inward comfort, I rose from my knees after a brief space, feeling marvellous calm though still most desolate.

On leaving the chapel, a boy, who was oft employed for house errands, gave me a sealed note, and touching his lip in token of silence, hurried away before I could so much as question him. I broke the seal and read:

"To the fair hands of Marjorie Lesley, these lines, to pray of her gentle grace and courtesy that she will pity one who may soon be shut from the light of her face for ever, and come to the eastern end

of the large hall to-night, where the armour hangs, as soon as the worthy Sir Reginald and his worshipful lady shall have retired to rest, that I may take farewell of her in the fashion that suiteth a true man and her devoted lover. GEORGE PERCY."

Now, at any other time, methinks a letter of this character would have much affrighted me; for, certes, to hold a secret assignation did go contrary to my best thoughts of maiden propriety. Yet, when I reflected within myself that in sorry truth it might be I should never behold the gallant Percy more, my reason and judgment gave way before the mighty force of my affection, while the joy and gratitude of my soul was great to know that he, so brave a gentleman, should have declared himself my lover. So with exceeding impatience I lived through those weary hours of the evening, and worked at my tapestry-frame with my lady mother till the hour came for the household to retire to rest. Then said my mother: "Dost thou sleep well, my Marjorie, or are thy nights troubled by ailments, that thou speakest not of! For truly thy cheeks are feverish in colour and thine eyes are too bright for health. Dost thou conceal a trouble from me, thy best friend?"

At this I was sorely grieved and ashamed, and for the first time I felt I could not meet my mother's glance. And here I would say that I have truly

an exceeding pity for those poor maidens who are in the same trouble as I was then—for to conceal a thing from one with whom ye have had beforehand no secrets is surely a grievous thing. And yet it would appear that parents are themselves sorely to blame for these things when they thus happen, for an we should confide all things unto them, we well know they would not have all the patience with our weakness that we so greatly need.

Thus I, before my mother, had no answer save, "Nay, surely, madam, trouble not for my welfare, for I sleep well, and naught ails me that I wot of." Whereupon she sighed heavily and said no more, but bade God bless me.

After she had thus left me, I, going slowly towards my own sleeping chamber, was struck with strange remorse. For was it not almost a cruel and unnatural circumstance that I, in the brief space of a few weeks, should have learned to love a stranger more than she who bore me, and whose tenderness for me had ever been great and untiring? And I, being thus heartily sorry and amazed at myself, paused an instant at my mother's door, and, kissing the oaken panels thereof, besought pardon in my soul of her whom I unwillingly wronged, while my tears fell fast. Yet did I not shrink from my undertaking, and I could scarce endure the quick throbbing of my heart while I waited in my own

room listening intently for my father's step upon the stair—the signal of his retiring for the night. It came at last, firm and unfaltering. I heard him open, close and bolt their bed-chamber door; and then, after some further little delay, I hastened from my room. Noiselessly, for I was clad in white garments of a soft and quiet texture, I sped along the dark length of the passages till I came to the eastern hall, where through the painted windows the moonbeams shone, casting strange shadows and patterns upon the ancient armour that hung upon the wall. The stately figure of the noble Percy stood out in bold relief from the darkness of the window embrasure, and as I approached him he turned hastily, and dropping on one knee, said softly:

"Our Lady and her angels bless thee, gentle Marjorie, for this exceeding favour thou hast shown to one who feels that he must speak to thee as a dying man speaks to his nearest and dearest. Thou must know already what I have to say—thou hast seen my confession in my eyes—and alas! I fear it hath displeased thee. Yet must I tell thee the utmost truth; for as Heaven hath willed it, love and death dispute my life between them, and honour, dearer than all, forces me to the grave while love would call me to thine arms! Yes, for I love thee, Marjorie—love thee with the utmost strength and

truth of a loyal heart; but thou, for thine own sake, I almost pray of thee to scorn me even as thou must forget while thou dost forgive me, Marjorie!" And he took my hands and kissed them tenderly, saying again: "Pray God thou dost not love me, sweet! But tell me whether thou dost or no, that I may the better understand the value of my life!"

Then I spoke up bravely and gladly, for me—seemed death must be beaten back by the force of true love.

"I love thee!" I said—"Truly I love thee with all my heart and soul; and O, I do beseech thee to guard thy most dear life for my sake!" And my strength gave way and I wept bitterly.

"My love, my Marjorie!" he murmured; and, taking me in his arms, he kissed me on the mouth and eyes, and pressed me strongly to his breast. And I thought: "If death came now to both of us how welcome it would be, for we should part no more!" And we were silent in that long and first embrace. At last my lover spoke:

"My sweet one, I will doubly guard my life to-morrow night for thy sake, and, please Heaven, all will be well. It is rumoured that the Roundheads have laid an ambuscade in the forest, and purpose to surprise us; but have no fear, I am only one of many, and I doubt not that we shall be victors

in the fray, if fray there be. But thou, my Marjorie, knowest thou what thou hast done? Thou hast pledged thy love to one in danger of death, and who can say if this has been well or wisely done?"

"Nay, dearest," I answered him, smiling, for I had grown suddenly full of hope and courage, "we are all in danger of death, and death will not take thee from thy love so soon. I shall welcome thee back in triumph, please God's good mercy!"

"Pray Heaven it may be so!" he said, with solemnity. "My loved one, thou wilt be true to me? For I may need to be absent from thee many weeks—thou wilt not regret thy vow of love—thou wilt keep my memory in thy heart?"

"For ever!" I answered. "Doubt me not! I will love thee and be true to thee always—through life and after death! I swear to thee my faith!"

"And I mine to thee," he said. "As God heareth us, I am in soul thy husband, and thou my wife! And so Heaven guard us both, and the Divine will be done! Bless me, my Marjorie, before we part, and kiss my lips of thine own free will!"

And I kissed and blessed him, and clung to him sorrowing deeply; and he, commending me to the care of Heaven, went with me to the foot of the

winding stair that led to my room. There, once more taking me in his arms, he said: "To-morrow night, my Marjorie, before this hour, thou wilt know the result of my mission. If fortunate, my messenger will bring thee tidings; if the reverse, I will come to thee myself. Ask me no more. Farewell, my gentle one! Love of my life, farewell!"

And, as if he could trust himself no more in my presence, he turned, hurried away and disappeared in the darkness of the hall, and I sped swiftly up the steep stair to my chamber, full of a strange confusion.

My first care on reaching my room was to kneel down and offer up thanks to God for having given me so inestimable a gift as the love of this true and noble gentleman, and to pray for his safety in the dangerous duty he was called upon to perform. I passed a troubled night, my head being full of dreams and fantasies, and with the daylight my countenance looked pale and heavy. On descending to the morning meal, I found my mother weeping, and, sorely affrighted, I asked her the cause.

"Alas, child!" she said, "thy father, foolhardy as he is, hath equipped himself and gone with Percy to join in the escort to His Majesty through the forest to-night. I knew that their secret converse had some deep reason, but I never dreamed that

thy father, at his advanced age, would leave me and thee, without a word of parting save this piece of writing which I hold." And my poor mother, with sobs and tears continuing, gave me a scroll of paper on which was hastily written, in my father's hand: "Blame me not, good wife, that I leave thee without farewell, for I dread thy tears and weakness more than a thousand armed Roundheads. His sacred Majesty must be protected, and I go to help the gallant Percy in this honourable cause, though he would fain have left me behind. Embrace our child for me, and pray for my safe return, which, if all goes well, will be about midnight, for our duty consists but in guarding His Majesty to the forest boundary. Farewell, and God save King Charles!"

My heart sank with dreary foreboding as I beheld my mother's tears, though I urged myself to offer her the best consolation of which I was capable. Little did she dream of the sorrow that filled my mind all that fatal day, for though I desired most ardently my father's safety, my dearest prayer and wishes were with my lover to whom I stood pledged. And almost did I loathe the King, for meseemed he was but one man, and not so much nobler and better than others, that so many brave gentlemen Cavaliers should shed their blood for his sake. And truly I know not if I am disloyal,

but, as disconsolate widows and orphans can testify, we owe many griefs to our late King Charles, and few joys.

But it is meet that I should hasten on with this narrative of my suffering, which now approacheth to the bitter end. How that day passed with us, I know not. My mother spoke little, and sighed oft, and, gazing constantly out of the window, we both watched for we knew not what.

Day dragged slowly on, and lengthened into evening. The retainers served the supper on the board, and though we feigned to eat, it was a poor pretence. And when the meal was cleared, we again took our places by the window, and resumed our weary watching. The hours passed away, and still we remained, silently looking at the long shadows that the moon cast upon the green-sward.

It was a strangely still night; and the sound of the ancient timepiece in the hall striking eleven caused us to start as though an alarm had rung in our ears. My mother rose and came to me. She placed her hand on my neck—a hand so cold that I shivered at the touch, though it was a mild and balmy night.

"Thinkest thou, Marjorie," said she, in faint accents—"thinkest thou they will return in safety?"

My heart ached for her. Her voice sounded feeble, and, in the uncertain light, her face was pale as the face of the dying.

"Yes, sweetest mother!" I answered her, striving to speak with cheerfulness. "In a brief space we shall hear the ring of the horses' hoofs upon the stone court, and we shall know our fears have all been vain and foolish. Only, I pray thee, look not so pale, for thou will fright my father when he enters. Thou must look gay and brave, as befits the wife of so noble a Cavalier."

"Ah!" sighed my mother, "and art thou so brave, my Marjorie? But it is easy for thee to be fearless; thou hast never loved!"

I shuddered as with deadly cold, but said no more, and then followed a space of time during which we neither spoke nor moved, and the silence between us was a silence as of some unknown warning. It was broken by the sharp, ringing sound of a horse's hoofs galloping furiously into the courtyard, and my mother and I sprang up and rushed out.

"What ho!" called my father's voice, in accents of loud impatience. "Send some of those lazy varlets hither! We have fought and dispersed the rascally Roundheads, but the gallant Percy lies wounded to death about a mile from here, and I must needs send help to bring him hither. What,

Marjorie, Marjorie!" For I had sprung to my father's bridle-rein and was beseeching him, I know not in what words, to take me beside him. "The horse will trample thee, girl! Art mad? Wife—Marjorie! Our Lady, help us! Is the child frantic?"

"Father," I cried desperately—"father, for the love of God, take me with thee! I must, I shall go!" And now came up my mother, dazed with tears and astonishment, and to her I turned with the calmness of despair. "Mother, I pray of thee to hear me! I am George Percy's promised wife! Will ye deny me his last words?"

Then my father stared wildly upon me, saying—

"If this be true before God, I will take thee; but how can I believe so strange a tale?"

"Thou knowest full well," I said, "that I have never told thee a lie, my father, therefore waste no words, but let me go!"

And, waiting no further parley, I put forth all my strength to reach the saddle. My mother clung to me, with sobs and tears, but it seemed as though I heard her not; while my father, as one in a dream, placed me before him; and so, followed by mounted servants bearing sundry matters of useful aid, we galloped away—I all unheeding that I had left the house without mantle or hood, and

scarce feeling the quickness of our movement, for it seemed we travelled far too slowly for the necessity that called us.

Once methought my father kissed my brow and strove to put up in seemly order my unbound hair, but this was as though I might have dreamt such a thing had happened long ago. For I had but one fixed thought in my mind—it was that he, my lover, my promised husband, lay wounded unto death, and that with our utmost speed we might be too late. And on we galloped, till suddenly my father called aloud to his men behind, "Halt!" and drew rein. Dismounting, he lifted me from the saddle and assembled his servants together, leaving but one to care for the horses; and, treading swiftly, yet cautiously, we penetrated into the shadow of a cluster of elm trees, through the leaves of which the moon shone softly.

There, on the sward, lay the gallant Percy, and as I sprang to his side the moonbeams showed me how his life blood had soaked through the gay crimson of his vest, just where but the previous night my head had lain. And now, beholding the paleness and stillness of his countenance, my heart grew cold with anguish. I kissed his lips—I felt for the beating of his heart—all was still! I looked up, and saw my father and his retainers standing

near me with bare heads bent low as though in prayer.

"What!" I cried. "He is not dead—he cannot be dead, my father! Have ye brought remedy, and ye stand inert and foolish as though there were no help or hope? Lift his head! Oh, Percy, my love, my life!" And here I threw my arms wildly about that passive figure lying straightly on the sward. "Speak to Marjorie!—speak to me for the love of God!"

A heavy silence followed, and I, looking once more upwards, saw the cold stars pitilessly shining on my agony and on the noble dead face that seemed as though it smiled. Then it was as though dark, clutching fingers seized my throat—a noise as of a surging sea broke upon my ears. I grew blind and sick and feeble in all my limbs, and sank in a heavy swoon. I remember nothing of the time that followed, but when I came to sense and sight I was in my own chamber at home. My mother sat beside my couch, and wept when I spoke. But with my waking came the thought of my misery and loneliness, and I asked with tears:

"Where—where have they laid him?"

"Oh, my child," murmured my mother, "if thou wouldst be but silent and calm! Think of me, thy mother, and cherish thy life, my daughter, for my sake!"

"I will!" I answered, for her better content. "Only tell me where they have laid him!"

"But a day has passed since he was brought here," said my mother softly. "His body lies ready for burial in the eastern hall."

I was silent. The eastern hall was the place of my betrothal—it should be the scene of my only bridal! I knew then what I should do; but to compass my design I feigned to be at peace, and, telling my mother that I could sleep, I lay motionless, counting the minutes of the long afternoon, and watching it deepen into evening. About an hour after sunset my mother brought me food and wine, whereof I partook, to her joy and satisfaction.

"Leave me, my mother," then said I, "and let me have this night alone without thy anxious watching, for I can sleep far better, knowing thee also to be at rest, than if thou wert here through the long hours of the night, exposing thyself to anxiety and fatigue. Leave me"—and my voice faltered—"and I will pray for a better resignation to my sorrow, and so, by God's help, to-morrow I shall be well!"

And my mother, with many kisses and tears, embraced and left me.

I passed the intervening time in prayer till all the household had gone to rest and unbroken silence

reigned. Then I rose from my bed, [illegible] my limbs were so feeble I could scarcely stand to attire myself in the same white gown which I wore when I had listened to the vows of my first and only love. But with rest between-whiles at last I did succeed, and, placing a diamond ring of good value—my richest possession—on my finger, I opened my chamber door noiselessly, and, walking as swiftly as in my weakness I was able, I went to my marriage with the dead.

Arriving at the eastern hall I looked not to right or left, but went unfalteringly up to the spot where I saw they had laid the body of the gallant Percy on an open bier. They had left him in the attire in which he fell—they had but placed a crucifix upon his breast and a wreath of bays at his feet, while over him was flung a dark velvet covering bordered with gold.

So he lay, calm and cold and smiling, with uncovered visage, his drawn sword lying close to his right hand. And I, kneeling down, did solemnly vow my wifely troth, holding the dead hand of my love in mine own, and by good chance perceiving on his third finger a ruby signet ring, I drew the jewel therefrom with reverent care, and in lieu thereof did humbly place my diamond circlet. And so was my marriage with my love completed, and I was free to weep my fill of tears as I kissed

again, and again the cold and quiet countenance that I should see no more. And truly God knoweth it is great wonder my heart broke not as I looked my last upon my love, for scarce could I summon force to part from him, though well I knew his spirit lived and loved me with ever quickening tenderness, and that this cold clay, so dear to me, was naught but a fair, empty casket from which the jewel had been taken.

And hardly could I feel my way back to my chamber, so blind was I and choked with tears; and when at last I reached it I could not rest upon my bed, but I knelt before my crucifix and prayed sore. And the morning came, and found me kneeling still.

With the earliest twittering of the joyful birds, I heard the hushed tread of many feet passing under in the eastern hall. And then I knew they were carrying my bridegroom to his last rest, and so I moved not nor wept, but still continued in my prayer. After some time, I know not how long, there came a quiet step to my door. It opened, and my mother stood before me.

"What, dressed, my Marjorie, and at thy prayers?" she said, embracing me. "Nay, that is well!"

And I replied not, but suffered her to speak and lavish her caresses upon me. So, after a while,

entered my father; and methought for so rugged and rough a man, he was marvellous tender for me, for he gave way to tears, a thing whereat my mind was strangely perplexed. And when he spoke, it was still with a faltering voice.

"The noble George Percy is at rest, my child," he said. "And what thou hast told me must needs be true, for on the brave knight's finger I saw thy diamond circlet. Fear not!"—for I had started up in dismay lest they should have moved my pledge of love from the dear, dead hand. "Fear not, my Marjorie! Thinkest thou thy father would commit a sacrilege?—for sacrilege it would have been to remove the token of love exchanged between ye! Thou hast his signet, I see! And yet my eyes must have been dim with age, or sorrow, or both, for I would have sworn I saw that ruby signet on his hand when we laid him on his bier last night. I must have erred; and so thy diamonds, Marjorie, lie buried with thy first love, who was, without denial, worthy of thy maiden affection. Yet thou must take heart, my child, and pray to God to give thee fortitude, and cheer thyself to know that thy two brothers, absent so long, have returned to their native land, and will be with us to-morrow. And George Percy lost his life in a noble cause, for His Sacred Majesty hath escaped his enemies for this time at least. Though if Percy

had not fought single-handed with two of the crop-eared scoundrels who were upon us it would have gone hard with the King! I would give much to know the history of the brave gallant, for he gave me no details of his birth or family. It was in the name of King Charles our friendship commenced, and it has ended in sorry fashion, though little did I think that thou, my Marjorie, so young and tender, wert destined to this love and sorrow! But cheer thee, cheer thee, sweetheart, and Our Lady bless and keep thee!"

And my father blessed me solemnly and left me with my mother, to whom I said, "If it be possible, and thou lovest me, say no more of what passed!"

And my mother promised.

So from that day my life was lived as one apart from earthly things. My brothers, two noble youths, dwelt with us at home, till both of them chose sweet wives, and wedded; and at the time I write now their children surround me, and call me "Aunt Marjorie." My eldest nephew but yestereve brought me his promised bride, a sweet maid of eighteen summers old, to receive my blessing. My honoured father and mother lived unto a ripe old age, and passed away in the fullness of peace and trust in Christ. And now I thank Him who ordaineth all things that the time of my

pilgrimage is nearly done. I have lived out my youth and my prime, and am declining slowly into the rest for which I have long waited.

While I was still young, many a worthy and true gentleman desired to have me to wife; but I was so sorely distressed at such approaches that in good time they ceased to trouble me. Once, indeed, my father and mother strove to make me consider deeply how much I wilfully lost by rejecting honourable proffers of marriage, and they used many gentle persuasions to move the resolve I had made in my heart. But to all their words I gave the sole reply that I was already wedded, and that if they truly believed our holy Christian creed, I was not to blame for keeping my troth where it was plighted; for at the last day, when parted spirits meet again, of a verity it would not beseem me to greet my love with a broken faith.

And seeing me so resolved, they let me be, though truly I believe it was a cause of mourning to them to know that when they laid the gallant Percy in the grave they also buried their daughter's heart and hope of happiness in this life.

But how joyful it is to consider the briefness of this period of our existence! For all my being thrills with gladness as the days travel on apace, making this body of mine more feeble and weakened,

while my soul groweth ever more strong and young. For full well I know how soon now I shall join my love whom I have loved so long and tenderly—and God be thanked that I can look into his radiant face fearlessly and say: "I have been true to thee, my beloved, even as I promised!"

And now to conclude this poor history. I do counsel all maidens to beware how they lightly receive the inestimable gift of love. For it is the greatest of all blessings—the richest of all possessions—and cometh directly from the hands of God, who will not suffer us to treat His benefits as of small account, without due punishment.

And I most heartily thank my Creator for the quiet happiness and peace in which I have passed my life—for the friends with whom I have had pleasant intercourse—for all the blessings which are too many and great for me to justly number. But of all gifts and benefits to me unworthy, I praise Him most for having given me the power to keep my faith to my love unbroken to the end!

(*Signed*) MARJORIE LESLEY.

November, 1693.

*   *   *   *   *

At the close of the manuscript there followed these words in a different handwriting:—

"This same Marjorie died on the sacred vigil

of the Nativity of our Blessed Lord, 1693, full of faith, hope, and surpassing joy and peace, so much so that they who stood around her bed ready to weep were perforce restrained by amazement at the exceeding rapture and youthful beauty of her countenance which, as the last breath passed her lips, became fair and lovely as that of a maid of seventeen, and so remained when she was laid upon her bier.

"And by her own desire, expressed in her last words, her body was interred beside that of one George Percy, to whom she had been betrothed in youth, a knight who met his death in a midnight scuffle, fighting for the late King Charles. Upon the third finger of her left hand she wore this knight's ruby signet, which jewel was buried with her.

"All the people of the country followed her remains to the grave, for truly it seemed she had lived so holy and pure a life that she was honoured by the poorer classes as a saint. And so, though it was a cold season, on Christmas morn the turf above the graves of her and the knight whom she had loved could scarce be seen for flowers that had been brought from all parts of the county by rich and poor, as offerings of reverence and affection.

"Therefore it would appear that she was an exceeding noble and virtuous gentlewoman, and

so she will ever remain in the memory of all those her relatives and friends who knew her qualities, and who constantly commend their souls to her gentle intercession as well as to all parted saints, to whom, through God, be due praise and glory for ever!"

So ended the simple old-world chronicle. As I finished reading it, the thick boughs above me swayed whisperingly in a soft wind, and the clear, bright note of a happy thrush calling to its mate sent a throb of music through the air. I looked up from where I lay in the hammock, with the close web of luscious leaves over my head—cool and deep and darkly green, with flecks of light crossing the shadows, and thought of Marjorie Lesley and her lover—her happiness of one night, and her years of patient loneliness—and then the exquisite lines of Keats repeated themselves within my memory like the cadence of a song.

For truly I would rather be struck dumb
Than speak against this ardent listlessness,
For I have ever thought that it might bless
The world with benefits unknowingly;
As does the nightingale, up-perched high
And cloistered among cool and bunched leaves,
She sings but to her love, nor e'er conceives
How tiptoe Night holds back her dark grey hood—
Just so may Love, although 'tis understood
The mere commingling of passionate breath,
Produce more than our searching witnesseth!

Even so it may! But to fall out of the "crystal clear empyrean" of a perfect faith unbroken, and find oneself on the hard high road of modern life, with its cycling, racing, gambling, betting, unloving and unlovable women, who change their loves as capriciously as they change their gowns, and whom not even the sacred vow of marriage can restrain from open licentiousness openly flaunted, is as great a shock as it is to turn from Addison's "Spectator" to the latest halfpenny rag of "up-to-date" journalism. Reading the information on matters both public and private, served up to us in our daily Press, can we truly believe in love at all nowadays?

And if we can, do we? Is there a "Marjorie Lesley" to be found among the gracefully flippant, cold-eyed debutantes at the Buckingham Palace "Courts"? One who, having plighted her troth to her first love, would or could remain faithful to her pledge even though he to whom she gave it were dead? Under all the satins, chiffons, and jewels beats there one such simple, loyal heart? Would not such a love be made a mere subject for idle mockery, even if it existed? And would not any woman capable of remaining unwedded all her life for the sake of it, be jeered at by her own sex as an "old maid" in the ape-like derision of the majority for something higher and nobler than

themselves? I fear so! For the days of Marjorie Lesley are not our days!

Her ideas of love and constancy differed widely from ours, and her sentiments of honour and fidelity to her first love were as "old-fashioned" as ours are rapid, vapid, and wholly unworthy of the hallowing touch of a lasting remembrance. Sweet, foolish Marjorie! She had not the "arts" to calculate that perhaps if her "gallant Percy" had lived he might have proved false and unworthy! To devote one's life to the mere shadow of a love-dream seems, when viewed by our latter-day notions, eminently unpractical; yet there is something beautiful in it, something which we cannot despise in the memory of a woman who lived so purely, so simply, and so faithfully! And, despite the appalling personal selfishness and "push" of the present day, there is surely room for such women still. Perhaps, indeed, there was never so much chance for them to display their goodness as now. It is a doubting age: all the more need for the sweet prayer of faith from pure lips. It is a murky time: all the more reason for the light of stars. Mammon rules the hour: all the more radiantly would the light of a loyal, unselfish love burn in those grim Halls of Eblis, the haunts of modern society—where, as in the tale of "Vathek," all cover their hearts with their hands, lest the

gnawing flames of vanity, ambition, avarice, and pride should be seen. And, among many new fashions, perhaps the "old-fashioned" way of love is best!

BROWN JIM'S PROBLEM

BROWN JIM was an ordinary miner, with no aspiration to be anything more. He was a big, hulking, long-limbed fellow, with a skin so darkened by the sun that he seemed almost a mulatto, though he was truly a " white " man—" white " in more senses than one. He was the chief authority on manners and morals in a certain mining camp, where for years men had been digging for gold, with unsatisfactory results. There was a rich vein somewhere, but so far it had not been found. All sorts of nationalities, ages and dispositions had gathered in that camp from time to time. None of them seemed to care very much whether they stayed on or went away quickly, or whether the quartz crushed in the mill was rich or poor; they went on with their labours monotonously, and took their weekly pay from the taciturn director of the " works," who appeared to live, in a little office like a signal-box, as monotonously and resignedly as themselves. Brown Jim, however, was not quite like the rest of his mates. Nobody knew where he came from; he was a good worker, and of peaceable,

contented, sober habits, and that was sufficient for all purposes. "Brown" he was called by reason of his tanned complexion, which gave curious effect to the clear blue of his eyes—eyes like those of a sailor accustomed to look a long way off. And by general consent he had been voted to take care of and play the host to a stranger who had strayed into the camp, partly by chance, partly through sheer exhaustion and craving for food. Brown Jim, lean and ungainly, had surveyed the wanderer from head to foot with an immediate perception of his calling and election, but had forborne all question or comment till he had fed him sufficiently to recover his weakening equilibrium; then he had said curtly:

"You're a Gospeller, aren't you?"

The stranger smiled deprecatingly.

"I'm a missionary," he answered, "if that's what you mean."

Brown Jim nodded.

"That's what I mean. You're the cut for it. Poor, weak little shaveling! Your friends ought to know better than to let you go wandering about the world with naught but the Bible to keep you going! What's your name?"

The "little shaveling" replied at once, and frankly—

"Matheson—John Matheson. I preach in camps and read to the men——"

"Oh, you do, do you? Well, you'd better not preach here, nor read neither—the boys won't stand it; but you can tell stories if you like."

"Can I?" And the missioner smiled again. He was not a bad sort, and he liked this big lumbering man with the dark face and blue eyes. "What sort of stories?"

Brown Jim considered.

"Well, I s'pose they'd better be love stories!" he said. "There ain't much love about here, and the boys get a bit hungry for wimin now and ag'in. Yes, they'd better be love stories!"

Matheson, who, when he was at home, was a Methodist preacher, hummed and hawed, and tried to look severe.

"I'm afraid I don't know any!" he confessed.

Brown Jim glanced at him disdainfully.

"Say!" he exclaimed. "Don't you play old hide and seek with me. Don't know any love stories? Where were ye born? Why, if ye were a bear in the Rockies you'd know a love story and growl it. Come, I don't take that. If ye don't know any love story you'll have to make one. I'm just nuts on love!"

Matheson looked at him as he spoke in a kind of timorous amazement. The man was a giant in build and muscle—one that seemed capable of felling a tree with a couple of blows. It was the

quaintest thing in the world to hear him say he was "nuts on love." But a stray missioner in a wild part of Arizona, finding himself with a section of more or less lawless humanity, has little opportunities to argue niceties and conventions; and so it came to pass that John Matheson, known in some parts of his native State as a "pulpit thumper," accommodated himself to the wishes of "Brown Jim," who advised him that this was the only way to pay for his entertainment, food, and sleeping accommodation; and for about a week managed to please his rough audience by abridged versions of world-famous love stories, beginning with "Romeo and Juliet," and coming down to the latest tragedies of disillusioned romance he could find or remember in the "sensational" Press. The men for the most part listened in solemn silence—it was impossible to tell whether they were interested or bored; but, on the last evening he spent in camp, he took it upon himself to thank them for their friendliness, and to ask if he might "put up a prayer" for them all before he bade them farewell. No one raised an objection. They all sat round him, smoking in an imperturbable calm, while he, moved by a sudden fervour, knelt down and prayed for these "labouring souls of men"—that not one might be lost, but that all might be saved and brought into the heaven of the Father. And

as he "wrestled" in his prayer a great and eager tenderness overwhelmed his mind. He looked at the brawny figures, the work-worn, furrowed faces, and thought of their hard, poorly-recompensed toil —day after day the same thing—day after day, and no respite from the grinding of the quartz and the measuring of the gold! What uplifting influence was here to make these men all they might have been with a different sort of environment? And yet—was *he* any happier? He, with his poor health, his weak will, his vague efforts after an utmost good which he had not sufficient intelligence to define—was he any higher, any nearer to the goal of a perfect nobleness than any of these rough miners, smoking sedately and thinking unutterable things? He ended his prayer with an inward sigh and a sensation as of tears in his throat, and as he rose from his knees, Brown Jim nodded encouragingly.

"That was well prayed!" he said. "It won't be your fault, mister, if some of us boys don't feel the tickle of the angels' wings growing! Eh, lads?" An[illegible] he looked comprehensively round the circle of [illegible]kers. Some of them nodded—one or two sm[illegible] sheepishly—but none resented the prayer; th[illegible] all seemed glad it was over. Brown Jim is a sta[illegible]aking himself like a big retriever. "Now, [illegible] continued, "this love-story teller will be

on his way off in the morning, so you'll not see him again mebbe in this world. Say good night and good-bye. I'm taking him round to my shanty to sleep so I'll be able to put him on the right road at sunrise."

One by one the men rose, and gravely shook hands with Matheson. For the most part they were mute, though here and there a young fellow shyly murmured, "Thank you for your stories," or "Hope you'll get safe," or "Wish you luck." But otherwise the adieus were entirely undemonstrative. Brown Jim then strode away, Matheson following, to his own private dwelling, a wooden hut situated on a bit of clearing which commanded an open view of the surrounding country. Once inside he said—

"Now, sit down, Mister Prayer-man, and talk to *me* a bit. Ever since you've been here I've wanted to ask you a question. If you could answer it you'd take a weight off my mind and save me a powerful deal o' thinking."

Matheson, still heart-warm with his pious petitions, looked at his companion sympathetically

"Anything I can do——" he began.

"Oh, it isn't anything you can *do*," retorted Jim impatiently. "So far as I've seen you can't *do* nothing for anybody except walk round with the Bible and tell a few stories. But you could ju

say what you think might be the truth—the whole truth—for to me 'tis a problem."

He ruffled his dark hair with one hand, and his blue eyes filled with a yearning and wistful expression.

"You see, 'tis this way," he went on. "I'm a lone man, and, so far as I know, I never had a soul belonging to me. I was a foundling, and all I ever heard of myself was that I was found on a doorstep in Fifth Avenue." He laughed, and seemed whimsically amused. "Fifth Avenue! Great Scott! If I saw Fifth Avenue as a baby, I've never seen it since. Well, let the between parts go to blazes. It's enough to say that I've been working all my life at all sorts of jobs, but never settled down anywhere, and so nobody ever cared for me, nor I never cared for nobody. Now, this is my *pro*-blem." And he emphasized the word. "You being a Gospeller ought to know how to settle it. You've just been praying for the boys out there, and hoping they'll all get to the 'heaven of the Father.' Now, what's heaven?"

The "Gospeller" almost jumped off the bench whereon he was seated, the question was so sudden and unexpected.

"W-what's heaven?" he stammered. Then, recovering his self-possession, he said: "Heaven is a state of perfect goodness, happiness, peace.

Heaven is the next world where we go when we die—a beautiful world where we shall meet all those we love and who have loved us."

Brown Jim held up a finger.

"Stop right there," he interrupted, "because there's my *pro*-blem. Take it well in! I've never had anyone to love, and no one has ever loved me. There you are. What's the good of *my* going to heaven? There isn't anybody there that knows *me*! I'd be among strangers."

Matheson's little round eyes opened in wide perplexity. This was a position which had never occurred to him. He had always taken it for granted that everybody must have some one in heaven, loved and lost on earth—mother, father, sister, brother, friend, sweetheart, or child. Now, here was a man who declared he had nobody there that knew him. Well, what was he to say? Brown Jim, seeing his embarrassment, went on—

"I'd be among strangers, and ye know how downhearted and a bit shy you're bound to feel when ye goes right into a strange world and find everybody looking at ye as though you'd no business to come. Then, again, I take it heaven is a world where they're all good, powerful good. Now, I've never met a mortal man, nor woman neither, that's good enough for such a place. I'm not—that's clear enough! I haven't been a bad chap—

bad enough to be roasted and fried for ever and ever. No! By all the blessed saints!" And he brought his huge brown fist down upon his knee with an emphatic thump. "I can say that fair and free. I've never known any poor human creature bad enough to deserve being stuck on a devil's toasting-fork!"

Matheson, feeble of nerve and confused in mind, felt almost stunned at the explicit and peremptory tone of this assertion.

"So y'see," went on Brown Jim more calmly, "I'm in a sort of fix. I don't know anybody either in heaven or in hell. I couldn't shake hands with anybody in one place or t'other. And I tell ye what, there must be thousands like me. I'm not the only foundling that's been left on a Fifth Avenue doorstep. And what I want to know is just this: What's to become of me when I get off this planet? I want to go where I can meet friends somewhere. That's nat'ral, ain't it? You're a Gospeller, and you ought to be able to tell me something about it."

Matheson tried to pull himself together and offer some sort of answer to this strange, long, lean man with the curious "*pro*-blem."

"If you *have* no friends," he said slowly, "and if you never *had* any friends, I'm sorry for you."

"Ay, so am I!" agreed Jim. "But that don't

clear up the business. Being sorry don't help any man. Now, s'pose you tell me a thing or two. I don't want to make partic'lar inquiries, but mebbe you're married?"

"Yes, I am," Matheson replied.

"Well, s'pose your wife died, or—we won't say that—but say she just skooted off to heaven, you'd have some one there you'd be glad to see when you went there, eh?"

Matheson's leaden-white skin turned a yellow-red. He was desperately worried, for his conscience told him an unpleasant truth—namely, that if his wife "skooted off," as Brown Jim graphically suggested, he would *not* be glad to see her again in the next world. She led him too terrible a life of "nagging" in this one. But, for convention's sake, he played the hypocrite and answered—

"Naturally, I should be glad to see my own wife in Heaven."

Jim smiled—a knowing sort of smile.

"You would? Well, *that's* all right. Lucky for you. There are one or two chaps who'd be glad to see some one else's wife there. They'd think it real heaven then! Twouldn't be proper, I know—that sort of thing would suit t'other place better. But, then, s'pose a fellow found a woman down there he couldn't get at on earth, he'd be better pleased than with an angel. That's so."

Matheson pursed his thin lips together.

"You speak feelingly," he said, with a slight touch of satire. "I remember you told me you were 'nuts' on love. Perhaps you have a love story of your own."

"Ne'er a bit of one," answered Jim at once with breezy frankness. "No woman ever looked at me twice. That's why I'm 'nuts' on love. I'd like to have a girl to love me, and I'd like to love a girl; but it's no use hankering that way. I'm cut off that sort of thing altogether. There's no girls or women hereabouts 'cept Injuns—decent poor souls enough—but you wouldn't go fair crazy about having one of them to cuddle. All the same, I can fancy just what love could be if I'd anything to love."

His blue eyes grew dreamy and absorbed, and he puffed at his pipe slowly.

Matheson fidgeted with his feet on the sanded wooden floor.

"Well, I'm afraid," he said, after a pause, "that your 'pro-blem' is one that you must settle yourself. You see that, don't you? If you've got no one to love you and you don't love anybody, *I* can't alter it, can I?"

"No," replied Jim thoughtfully—"no, ye poor little chap, you can't alter it. I didn't ask you to do the impossible. I just said how it was with me;

and you being a Gospeller, I thought you could tell me where I might be likely to go, seeing I've nobody who expects to see me in heaven or t'other place."

Struck by a sudden inspiration, Matheson said—

"Yes, I *can* tell you. You will go to God the Father. He will know you. He will see you, lonely as you are; He will——"

"Stop that!" And Brown Jim suddenly rose, drawing himself up to his full height. "Stop that, I say! I haven't lived among the hills and cañons all these years for nothing. I take it God the Father don't care more about me nor you than He does for a midge or a butterfly, and that's not saying blasphemy. For, in my opinion, the midge and the butterfly is just as worth taking care of as a man—worth more, perhaps. For the blessed little things *don't* talk—as a consequence they don't tell lies. They does their duty, and that's what few humans ever do without being paid for it. And God the Father cares for all and all alike, no difference between us, anyway—man and beast, bird and flower. That's my faith, and now you've come to it! See here, Mister Gospeller! I don't *believe* in a heaven made up of all good people. I *don't* believe in a hell made up of all bad people. 'God the Father,' as you say, wouldn't stand either place for a moment. It—it 'ud be like a wrong figure in a

sum, and the sum wouldn't never come straight. And if ever there was a straight thing in this creation, it's God the Father's way!"

He made a picture at the moment, his big, heroic figure standing in the open doorway of the hut, silhouetted against a late evening sky faintly reddened by the last hues of what had been a magnificent sunset. And Matheson, looking up at him, suddenly felt cheap and small and narrow in spirit; he could not rise to the largeness or simplicity of Brown Jim's "confession of faith." But he made a final struggle against the overwhelming sincerity of the man.

"If those are your sentiments," he said, "you ought to have no 'problem,' no doubts or difficulties. You should take God on trust, even if you have no one that knows you in heaven or——"

"Hell," finished Jim, with a laugh that gave radiance to his dark face and sparkling eyes. "You're right. That's just what I do. I was only putting you through your paces, Mister Gospeller. You prayed so much, and with such a good heart, asking that the boys and me included might all be brought safe into the 'heaven of the Father,' that I thought I'd just point out to you the plain fact that heaven wouldn't be exactly heaven to me, knowing nobody there. But when you come to God the Father, you strike a different note. And

lone man as I am, I don't care where He puts me, or what He does with me. My lonesomeness is my own fault, mebbe. Anyway, here I am in this world, and if I wasn't no use of some sort I shouldn't have come. Why"—and he ruffled his curling locks again and smiled—"when you come to think of it, if I'd been told before I was born that I'd be in such a place as this, where trees and flowers grow, and birds almost talk to ye, and blue skies are over your head, and good earth to tread on under your feet, I shouldn't have believed it. I should have said 'twas a fairy tale. So y' see what's happened once is like to happen again, an' I take it that when I'm done with the life here I'll get born again in a world as pretty as this—perhaps prettier—and I'll be able to sit on a tree stump and watch the live things all about me just as I do here, and I shouldn't be surprised if I found some one there I might care for, and who might care about me. You understand me? I believe the Almighty Supreme knows just what I've missed, and that it won't always be missing."

"Then your problem is solved," said Matheson sedately. "And you don't need to ask me anything more about it."

"No, not exactly." And Jim looked at him with a kindly tolerance. "Only just this: When you get praying and talking about heaven, call a

half for a minute and think whether any of the chaps you're talking to are likely to *want* to go there, whether it 'ud make them happy like. And if so be you should fancy they're not quite the angel-and-a-harp sort of make, you might change over the wording a bit and offer them a bit of home and a bit of love to think about, making sure that God the Father—*as* a father—would never deny them that. Home and love, Mister Gospeller. They'd make a heaven anywhere—even in hell!"

Matheson sat stiffly silent for a moment. Then he got up and said—

"Well, good night! I suppose I'd better turn in."

"I s'pose ye had," agreed Jim, without mentioning the fact that he was giving up his own bed to the missioner, in order that so physically weak a man might have a comfortable night's rest before beginning his journey on the morrow.

"You'll have to start an hour before sunrise to get through the bush. I'll wake you up in time for a bite and a cup of coffee."

Matheson thanked him; then, with a smile, said—

"You're a curious sort of chap, but your heart seems in the right place! Though, you know, you're not orthodox."

"What's that?" Jim inquired.

"Orthodox? Oh, I don't know! It would take too long to explain. But it must comfort you to feel that our Lord died for you."

"I hope He didn't!" said Jim with sudden and unexpected emphasis. "I wouldn't have anyone die for *me*, if I knew it! I'd rather die myself!"

Matheson stared, astonished and almost frightened. It was such a knock-out blow to all his views.

"You mustn't say that," he stammered.

"Mustn't say it? But I will say it!" declared Jim. "Why, what sort of a snivelling, selfish, mean microbe of a man would allow anyone to die for him? What comfort is he going to get for his wretched carcase out of that! Here, you go to bed! You've talked enough, and so have I! Be thankful for the power of sleep! Amen!"

Matheson hesitated; then, as Jim lit a candle and, putting it into his hand, waved him off to his bunk, he held his peace and turned in.

Left alone, Brown Jim lit another pipe and went outside his shanty. There was no moon, but the stars in their multitudinous brilliant battalions shone with a large, white splendour in the dark violet immensities of space, seeming now and again to flash like beacons set on the heights on invisible eternal hills. The thick stump of a felled tree was Jim's favourite seat and coign of

vantage, from whence, in daytime, he could perceive the blue line which marked the far summits of the great gorge through which the Colorado river swept its way—even at night he fancied he could discern the topmost edge of those perpendicular walls, six to seven thousand feet high, cleft millions of ages ago by the rush of mighty waters. He sat down and puffed meditatively at his pipe, looking about him with observant eyes, his ears keen on every sound. He heard the mysterious rustle of the movement of living creatures on the ground, among the trees, and in the "bush" half a mile away—the monotonous, clicking music of the cicala, beating its fairy drum, and now and again the plaintive cry of an animal or the whirring of a bird's wings.

"We're all alike to the Almighty Supreme!" he said reverently. "And wonderful it is how He takes care of us all! It's the one law for man and beast and bird—do what you find yourself set to do and trust in Providence. Ask no questions and you'll be told no lies! If you start worrying and kicking against a barred door you'll hurt yourself! That's plain! Why, there's a blue jay living about here that's as lonesome a-bird as I am a man—or if he's got a mate he's a deep customer, for I've never seen her. And yet he's busy storing up winter food as though he'd

raised a family. That's because he feels it's his duty to do it—mated or single. Just duty! For, says he to himself, a mate may come along at any moment; and suppose she does, what about winter housekeeping? That's so! He follows the law and does his duty; he isn't trying to get to a jay-heaven or a jay-hell! He's just a jay. And I'm just a man. Lonesome, too. But, all the same, I'm pretty satisfied. There's not a day I don't thank the Almighty Supreme for the blessing of sight—for this world is something to see, I tell you! Chock-full of wonders! If I lived to a hundred I should never be able to look at them all. I'd like some one to look at them with me—a pretty woman, with bright, tender eyes and little, kind hands; but suppose she *wouldn't* look—hadn't the sense to look? That 'ud be worse than lonesomeness! After all, I guess I'm pretty well off as I am! And for the poor little Gospeller sleeping in there"—and he made an instinctive gesture towards his shanty—"I hope he'll get to heaven if he wants to. Only I just can't fancy him with a crown on and a pair of wings!"

A slow smile irradiated his dark face—a smile altogether kindly and compassionate. Anon he lifted his eyes to the starred sky, and as he did so a meteor flashed up suddenly and came glittering downward through the dark in a trailing

flame of glory. Its fall was followed by a distant thudding sound, like the echo of spent thunder. And in the silence that followed it seemed to Brown Jim that a voice spoke in the air, saying—

"Stand still and consider the wondrous works of God."

A great awe enveloped his mind—an awe that in a poet would have awakened inspiration. But in him it remained what it was—an adoring devotion to the Unseen Power of which it is said—

"And God saw everything that He had made, and, behold, it was very good."

Early morning and the first golden hint of sunrise saw him guiding the missioner to the safest and best road through the bush towards the nearest village, called by courtesy a town. When the point of severance arrived, Matheson was conscious of a real regret at parting with this big, sincere, simple, upright man.

"Good-bye!" said he, as he shook hands. "You've been very kind—and I shall always pray for you."

"Don't you do that!" said Jim, smiling. "It'll give ye a deal of trouble for nothing!"

"Oh, no," declared Matheson, "it will be a pleasure! And maybe I'll send you some one to love!"

Jim's dark, level brows met in a quick frown.

"Don't try *that* on, Mister Gospeller!" he said, "I warn ye! None o' those sort o' games with *me*! If any woman's coming my way she'll come of her own accord; and if she's not to come, why she won't! You stick to the praying for yourself and your wife—that's quite enough for you to take on night an' morning. Don't ye worry your head about *me*! Once through the bush it's likely ye'll forget ye ever saw me!"

"It's not at all likely," replied Matheson, with real sincerity; "I shall never forget you! You're not a man one *can* forget."

Jim's slow smile again lit up his blue eyes.

"Well," he said, "if that's so, why so it is! The best of luck to you! Good-bye!"

"Good-bye!"

They shook hands. Matheson was tempted to utter a pious "God bless you!" but somehow he felt that his benediction was unnecessary. Yes—quite unnecessary for this big, upstanding, straight-minded man of the forests and the hills—inasmuch as God's blessing was already so plainly upon him. He turned away reluctantly, and, walking at as smart a pace as he could, soon lost sight of the tall figure and dark head, uplifted to watch him through the first half mile of the bush—while Brown Jim, retracing his steps to his own shanty and to the work of the day,

amused himself by reviewing his own "*pro*-blem."

"Guess I gave that poor little shaver something to think about!" he said, addressing the warm, palpitating presence of Nature all about him. "Mebbe he never met a man before who hadn't anybody waiting for him in heaven nor t'other place, and as a consequence hadn't much fancy for either! It won't hurt him to *con*sider it! These chaps take it all too much for granted that everybody *wants* to go to heaven! Some *don't*. It all depends on who's there to say how-d'ye-do. There's no heaven without a friend in it. And if the Almighty Supreme puts a man like me all alone in a place—a sort of Adam over again without Eve—why it's not easy to beat *this* in the way of a garden view!"

And he looked up at the fully risen sun with the undazzled glance of an eagle. Its splendour bathed the distant hills with changeful hues of rose and violet and gold, and beneath its spreading canopy of flaming rays the earth glistened, wet with the moisture of hidden rivulets and springs. Bright-winged birds and butterflies flew to and fro—and there was a strange, subtle, and delicious odour arising from the long grass and unseen herbs growing close to the ground, as well as from the pine-trees lifting their tapering points to the sky. It

was a moment of the morning when all creation thrilled with the expectation of the full day. And just then Jim's "*pro*-blem" ceased to be a problem at all. It was solved by the man's own power of manhood, which swept him close to the divine influences which had brought him into being; and he was glad to be alone. Any companion—Eve herself—would have been an unwelcome intruder upon the splendid serenity and the intense spirit of worship and gratitude which possessed the whole consciousness of this particular Adam in his own Eden. He straightened himself and drew in the rich, warm, life-giving air.

"If heaven is anyway like this," he said, "I could do with it! And I wouldn't ask for anyone to meet me there, neither! And—till I get there—if I ever do—this is good enough! No prayers for me, thank you—not so long as I've strength to praise God for all His beauty! Amen!"

THE BOY

AN EPISODE

THEY were sitting opposite each other at a table for two, in a certain restaurant made "popular" during the *danse macabre* of the war. The Boy was fair, with bold clear blue eyes under well-arched brows—and save for a certain delicate sensitiveness in the lines of his mouth and chin, his features made what is called a "strong" face. The Girl—his companion—was pretty, with that sort of prettiness found every day among barmaids and waitresses—good skin, plenty of hair, excellent false teeth, and roving eyes which wandered where they listed without any marked expression in them, save lively self-appreciation and sharp inquisitiveness. She was older than the Boy, but by reason of her artistic make-up, delicately-tinted cheeks and over-rubied lips, passed muster for being as young, or younger. He had met her at one of the "halls"; she had dropped her purse, he had picked it up for her, and then had assisted her to make way through the crowd

that pushed to the door of exit; and she, seeing from the badge on his khaki that he was from overseas, and a lieutenant in a Canadian regiment, engaged him in conversation with many provocative flashes of the roving eyes aforesaid, with the result that the Boy was somewhat dazzled and attracted by her prettiness, and asked her to lunch with him next day. Very rash and silly of him!—but "Boys will be boys"! She told him she was "in the War Office"—(by the way, it *is* remarkable what a number of "painted-lady" butterflies found work in that important section of Government activity!)—a statement which he confidingly accepted.

Their little luncheon together was quite pleasant—she chatted girlishly, and amused him for the moment, till, the meal being over, he offered her a cigarette and, lighting one himself, began to smoke, looking at her half-dubiously, half-admiringly, through a thin blue mist of tobacco.

"Ever been to Canada?" he asked.

She smiled—the charmingly even row of imitation pearls gleaming between the parted ruby lips.

"No, indeed! I should *love* to go!"

"Think so?" The Boy puffed a tiny ring of smoke from his cigarette. "It might be too cold for you."

"Is it cold?" This with a child-like air of ignorance.

"Why, you *know* it is!" he said, with a touch of impatience. "Especially at this time of year. You must have read about it, and seen cinema shows of it. There's one of your writing chaps over here who calls it 'Our Lady of the Snows.'"

"Charming," she murmured listlessly.

"I don't think it charming at all," declared the Boy. "It's a very stupid name. Because it's not always snow. Just now, in winter, of course it is. And it's very jolly snow. Dry and sparkling like diamonds. My mother's house is a perfect picture in the snow."

"Yes?" She looked up from under her curved lashes. "How pretty it must be!"

The Boy's face had become serious and wistful.

"Yes," he answered dreamily. "It's very pretty—and so is she!"

"She?"

"Yes—my mother."

The Girl—if girl she might still be called—was silent.

"You've no idea"—went on the Boy, speaking with sudden energy—"how pretty she is! She's young yet, though she is my mother—I'm only nineteen—and she looks younger than she is. I

don't think she'll ever grow old—she won't to *me*. She has the loveliest eyes in the world!"

"Oh! Really!"

"Yes, really!" And the Boy smiled happily. "They are so sweet and tender! Have you a nice mother?"

The Girl flushed hotly, as for a moment she thought, "If he knew!" But she merely flicked the ash from her cigarette with her little finger and answered softly, "I have no mother."

"Oh, by Jove! I'm sorry I asked! I'm such a clumsy chap! Do forgive me! It's jolly hard on you!"

She looked at him surprised and amused.

What a great baby he was!

"Oh! I don't mind!" she said. "We don't trouble much about our mothers over here."

"Don't you?" he said. "That's queer! I've only been over six weeks, and in training all the time, so I don't know much about the Old Country—but I always thought it was a sort of 'No place like home,' you know, where mothers and fathers and sons and daughters loved each other better than all the rest of the world."

"Some do—but some don't," replied the Girl, with a touch of mockery in her smile, "and I think the 'don'ts' have it! Your notion of family affection is quite ideal! Is that the way you live there?"

"It's the way *I* live," said the Boy simply. "Mother, father, sister, home—these are all I want and all I care for!"

"I wonder you could tear yourself away from them to come over here," she said coldly.

"It was a pull!" he answered with a quick sigh. "But I came because the Old Homeland wanted me —and *I* wanted to fight for it, and I'm ready to die for it, if die I must!"

She looked at him and a sudden thrill of shame and compunction ran through her little vain, hardened soul. In fancy she saw all the young strength of him shattered, and the fair, open face a mere blank white mask upturned to the pitiless heavens on the field of battle.

"When do you leave for the front?" she asked.

"The day after to-morrow," he answered.

She thought a moment. He had accepted an invitation to go with her to the theatre that evening and to supper at her flat after the play. It would be a hurried, early affair, certainly, but . . she alone knew how it would be "managed" or what that supper at the flat would cost him! Not only whatever money he had about him, but all his self-respect! She also knew he was alone in London at the time being, for a few days, with nowhere to go to, and no friends. And while she was thinking out the problem of evil

against good, and good against evil, he spoke again.

" I said that my mother's house was a picture in the snow, and so it is "—here he smiled as he looked at her—he thought she seemed suddenly prettier. " It is like a fairy house covered with diamonds. But I like it better in autumn, for we have lots of trees about the place, and they turn all sorts of splendid colours ; much brighter tints than you get in this country. The maples out there are just wonderful—they grow almost scarlet—you can't think what a fire they look like out in the woods. The last thing I saw when I left home was—what do you think ? "

" I can't imagine," she said softly.

" My little sister—she's only twelve—standing under the big maple on the lawn. The leaves of the tree had only just begun to turn a little—but I saw a red branch, and my sister's gold hair. Her hair is long and bright, and the glow of the setting sun just caught the leaves and the hair together." He paused. Then—" If the Boches finish me off, that's the last thing I shall see as I die—the red leaves of the old maple and my sister's gold hair ! "

Another pause. She had nothing to say.

" Shall we go now ? " he suggested.

They rose and passed out of the restaurant. At the door she held out her hand, smiling.

" Good-bye ! " said she.

"Good-bye?" He looked astonished. "Aren't we going to the theatre presently?"

"I'm so sorry!" she answered. "I ought to have told you before—but there's extra work at the War Office and I'm wanted there till quite late. So I'm obliged to put you off. I hope you'll excuse it?"

"Certainly—but—but——"

"I'll write!" she interrupted him hurriedly—"I'll see you some time to-morrow before—you go. I know your address—good-bye!"

The Boy gazed at her bewildered.

"But," he stammered, "this is so sudden!"

"Yes, it is—but you mustn't mind! The War Office, you know! I'll see you to-morrow. Take care of yourself—and—and I hope you'll have as happy a Christmas as you can—away from home!"

She smiled again—her roving eyes were almost human and womanly, with a sparkle as of dew in them—and in another moment she was gone. The Boy stood inert, gazing after her as in a dream.

"What a curious girl!" he said to himself. "The most curious girl I ever met!"

And he swung along on his way at marching pace still wondering.

She, meanwhile, hurried through the streets, feverishly nervous and impatient lest he should follow and overtake her, and, reaching her flat at last, entered and locked herself in.

"That's one good deed done in a bad life!" she said, with a reckless scorn of herself as she looked at her flushed face in a mirror. "A plunge to the rescue! Yet, not I, but his mother and sister have saved him—red maple leaves and gold hair! It's Christmas time, too, and—and he's only a Boy!"

CLAUDIA'S BUSINESS

ALL men's ways are, in theory, admirable; but some men's ways, in practice, are peculiar. All men are bound to be considered (by themselves at least) reasonable and logical—yet truth compels the statement that some men do not know their own minds. All men must be admitted as masters—" virile " and self-controlled—nevertheless the fact remains that some men are more faddish than the most nervous spinster. All men indignantly repudiate the accusation of selfishness; yet the chief drawback to some men is that they cannot escape from their own private demon of profound, unalterable egoism. Many hopelessly selfish men take peculiar delight in the play "A Message from Mars." They cannot see themselves anywhere in the piece, and that's where the fun comes in!

There was once a certain Man who was by way of being rather fond of, or somewhat in love with, a certain woman. He had dangled half-vaguely after her pretty petticoats for a considerable period,

all the while cogitating with himself as to whether he would do a wise or a foolish thing if he asked her to marry him. He never expressed any sentimental emotion towards her, either by touch of hand or word of mouth—and why? Because, in his absurd self-consciousness he thought he might look foolish—or that *she* might think he looked, or was going to look, foolish. Whenever he was in her company he imagined that every gnat in the air, every fly on the window-pane was staring at him, and commenting on his appearance. And the most curious part of his mental attitude was that he never once thought of Her at all in the matter. He felt that there was really no need to think of her, as of course if he proposed she would naturally jump to acceptance. He laboured under the pleasing delusion, so common to the male sex, that any woman, no matter how independent, wealthy or beautiful, must, must, MUST be delighted with an offer of marriage, even if the wooer were but an uglier type of the simian ancestor according to Darwin. Besides, he was an Englishman, and a lord — and he was in New York.

To be an Englishman is of course the greatest privilege on earth; to be a lord is but a doubtful honour nowadays, as there are so many of them —but when one is both, and in "N'York," one may perhaps be permitted to indulge in a pleasing

estimate of one's possible success among the Four Hundred. This particular lord—Lord Francis Markham, to give him his full appellation—certainly did so, and not without cause. He had stayed a month at the Astor House, and meant staying a month more, if Claudia Strange also remained in the city. He had met her a year ago in Paris, and had taken her to be a rather fascinating little doll of fashion, with a head full of no more serious matters than jewels and chiffons. She seemed to have plenty of money to spend; she was travelling alone *en princesse* with a French maid and an Italian courier, and she was received at the American Embassy with much affectionate enthusiasm. She dressed exquisitely, and though she owned to five-and-twenty looked about eighteen. Discreet inquiries concerning her or her belongings elicited very little information; the representative in France of the great American Republic had smiled pleasantly on being questioned and had answered with cheerful readiness—

"Claudia Strange?—Well, I guess she's just Claudia Strange and that's enough for most people! No—she hasn't a father living nor a mother, nor sisters, nor brothers—she's an unencumbered woman alone in the world, but she can worry through! She's made her pile!"

Lord Markham's curiosity was piqued, but not

satisfied. He tried to find out something more definite about her, but his efforts were unavailing. Finally, becoming stimulated by his vain investigations, he followed her to the States when she returned thither, whereby it will be seen that he had not much to do in his own country. Truth to tell, his own country bored him a little. He was only vaguely conscious of its worth. He belonged to that ultra-superior "set" who find all home produce, whether in food, art, music or literature, unsatisfactory, and everything foreign—delightful perfection! He was no use whatever to his party in politics; and his presence at Markham Hall, his estate in Berkshire, was of no particular joy or advantage to his tenantry, as he took no active interest in the place beyond such as concerned the preserving of game. Among his acquaintance he counted a few men of position and average intelligence, and several "rapid" women of fashion; and with these things taken all together his time was more or less wastefully occupied. Claudia Strange was a surprise to him. He had met many American women, but never one like her. She broke upon him, as it were, like a flashlight from an unexpected dark corner of life. She was pretty, in a mutinous *mignonne* style, but not extraordinarily so, for it was the extreme daintiness and elegance of her attire that went at least half-way to the making of

her general attractiveness—but she [illegible] dash and independence about her, [illegible] such an open and evidently sincere indi[illegible] and sundry of his sex, that his pride wa[illegible] his interest in her sufficiently goaded to [illegible] good simulation of "love." It was not [illegible]ally —he merely felt that he wou[illegible] rather [illegible] such a woman as Claudia for a wife [illegible]han any of the semi-masculine, golfing, hockey-pl[illegible] [illegible] girls who from season to season were tr[illegible] [illegible] inspection in the matrimonial market. [illegible]hen [illegible] rather in terror of lady nurses—fascinating females wearing white caps and white aprons with the [illegible] blazoned on their breasts had [illegible] more [illegible] could bear. So he himself saw nothing in any way singular or eccentric in his act of following Claudia over the Atlantic—she was a something quite new, and in his jaded state of mind he craved for novelty. So utterly weary was he of the sameness of things, that if he had happened to have a wife he would have made occasion to divorce her, just for the mere love of change.

A month in the States would have bored him as much as anything else, if Claudia had not been there. But there she was, brilliant, provocative, mysterious, and apparently always too busy to amuse herself in the ordinary ways and methods of her sex. And a month was all too short to find out anything definite

e became irritable and ill-tempered eotyped reply which his questions

Strange? Well! I guess she's just strange!" With shameless persistence he d for invitations to any and every house where thought he might meet this attractive personality: and being an English "lord" he had little trouble in knowing whomsoever he wished to know, and in being a frequent "guest of the occasion" at every dinner and reception wherein the Four Hundred were concerned. But Claudia was not always to be seen among these "select." It was as difficult to find her as it might be to find a pearl in a field of clover. On one occasion when he did suddenly discover her in the far corner of a dimly lit corridor, during a ball given at one of the most ultra-"swagger" houses in N'York, he was captivated afresh by the dazzling vision of fair hair, blue eyes, laughing lips, white arms, and delicate snowy chiffon attire, and was suddenly moved to ask her if he might have the pleasure of taking her to the theatre to see a special piece that was just then the vogue. She looked up, smiling, and simply "floored" him by the question—

"Why?"

He was curiously embarrassed. What an odd creature! No woman with any tact would ask a

man "why" he wished to escort her to the theatre or anywhere else! He drew himself up a little stiffly, bent his neck in his starched collar and repeated, with laboured politeness and an uplifting of his eyebrows—

"Why? . . . you ask why?"

"Yes"—said Claudia, frankly—"I ask why? You Englishmen never act on impulse! Why do you invite *me*? There are heaps and heaps of other women. Perhaps you want a 'tip,' eh!"

A "tip"! Really, really! His lordship's collar positively creaked in his amazement.

"I can give you one or two," went on the charming lady, confidentially—"You wouldn't lose, but you mightn't gain for a year or two. However, you might put in five hundred without much risk, and there's always the chance of a boom! We'd better talk it over. Yes—I'll come to-morrow. You'll have to call and fetch me. No, I won't dine, thanks! My day's rather crowded. Here's my number."

And, from a jewelled chatelaine dangling at her waist, she took up a gold card-case, opened it, found a card and gave it to him.

"That's my flat," she said—"My real home is on Long Island, but I'm having a new wing built and a Pompeian court, so I'm not living there just no and it's no use ringing up at my office after f Lord

Call for me twenty minutes before the curtain rises —I'll be ready. So long! "

She gave him another bright smile with this adieu, and rose from her corner seat, as a good-looking young man approached and claimed her for a dance. In two minutes she was whirled away in a maze of floating, gliding couples that filled the ball-room as a summer field is filled with flowers. Lord Markham stood for a moment under the light of an electric torch supported by the bronze figure of a flying cupid, and studied the card he held. It bore the name "Miss Claudia Strange," with the number of a flat in a huge block of "skyscrapers" not far from Central Park.

"Claudia got anything good on hand?" queried a strong nasal voice close behind him.

Lord Markham turned sharply round.

"I beg your pardon?"

"Granted!—though I don't know why you ask it!" and the speaker, a tall wiry man with a sandy-coloured beard, smiled broadly. "I guess it's only English folk who beg pardon when there's nothing to beg it for. I saw Claudia Strange and Co. talking to you, and her talk costs money, so I thought if there was any scent in the wind I might perhaps get a sniffle!"

"I really don't understand you"—said Lord Markham, coldly—"Miss Strange——"

"Oh, it's 'Miss' Strange, is it! Wal!—I guess you don't know much about her. N'York calls her Claudia."

Markham winced with a sense of shock. He could never marry a woman whom N'York called "Claudia"!

"Very familiar!" he said, with a stiff smile, "almost as if she were a chorus girl—or—a public dancer!"

"Yes, that is so!" agreed the sandy-bearded man. "Only she's more run after than any chorus kiddie or dancing doll alive. Chorus kids don't shake Wall Street—but Claudia *does*!—you bet! My business is ile—Wilcox's Ile Wells—that's *me*! and *I* know!"

Lord Markham had recourse to his eyeglass. It was a great assistance to him in matters of difficulty, and he fixed it in his right eye as a shield to ward off the metallic glance of this "ile" personage who presumed to speak to him without an introduction.

"Most interesting!" he murmured—"Perhaps, Mr.—er—er—Mr. Wilcox, you can tell me——"

"How she shakes Wall Street?" interposed Wilcox. "I can certainly do that! She's one of our sharpest brokers, and if *she* says 'Sell out!' there's a rush, and if she says 'Buy up!' there's a bigger rush!"

"One of your sharpest brokers!" repeated Lord

Markham, in bewilderment. "Do you mean to say that Miss Strange is a broker?"

"That is so!" answered Wilcox, evidently delighted at the impression his statement had made on the mind of an English Conservative. "And as far-sighted as a native Injun on a trail! You can deceive a weasel mebbe, but you can *not* deceive Claudia! Bogus companies don't get a look in with *her*! What *she* don't know about stocks and shares isn't worth knowing at all. If *she* puts you on anything you're there all the time! She's got a whole army of clerks under her working like movies on piece jobs, and you bet she keeps things humming! If you're one of her pals——"

"I'm afraid I haven't that honour"—said Markham somewhat frigidly—he was divided between irritation, curiosity and admiration, and his ideas of the proper sort of conventional marriage were all overthrown. How could he make a female stockbroker of Wall Street, N'York, Lady Markham of Markham Hall? The notion was perfectly preposterous! "I met the lady in Paris"—he continued—"but I have never known her intimately."

Wilcox took a big cigar from his pocket and looked at it meditatively.

"Ah!" he murmured—"Wal! If she don't put you on anything it's because she *won't*—that's about it! I'm sorry—I always pity a man wh

got a chance to fill his pocket and somehow misses doing it. But you English are slow—darned slow ! "

Markham smiled.

" Probably you are right," he agreed. " We are. But 'slow and sure,' you know ! "

The American looked him over keenly.

" Mebbe ! " he answered—" I hope so ! But a bit of hustle wouldn't hurt you ! "

With that he lit his cigar and strolled off.

Lord Markham, left to himself, sat down to think. He had, by chance, found out what he wanted to know, but the discovery was not exactly pleasant. She, the dainty feminine thing, whose interests, so far as he had observed, seemed centred in Paris hats and other frivolities of attire, was actually a busy stockbroker with a " whole army of clerks," buying and selling shares, watching the fluctuations of the money-market, and keeping a close finger on the varying pulse of the brute-god Mammon ! What an unwomanly career ! How unlike the " ideal " he, Markham, had formed of Woman as she ought to be—half-drudge, half-toy—devoted to the interests of her sovereign ruler, Man ! He believed in rigid discipline and subordination of the frailer sex ; and as for woman being allowed to have any control of finance, he considered the quality of their intelligence too utterly inferior and inadequate for such an idea ever to be seriously

entertained. He belonged to that very ordinary class of men who stick to an ancient and worn-out tradition as limpets stick to a rock—who talk glibly of progress and advancement for the male part of creation, with the mental proviso that this shall not include the female. To a man of Markham's type and up-bringing, a woman of education is only a better-informed sort of squaw, amused with beads, feathers and trinkets, made solely to bear children and to attend to their wants and the necessities of the home—or the wigwam; and the proposition that any one of the sex should take independent action apart from her lord and master is so astounding as to seem positively insane. A woman who has made a fortune by her own brain and hand, without man's assistance, finds herself always looked upon with more or less grudging suspicion by men; she seems to them a kind of "adventuress," and they call her "unsexed" because she seldom cares to have anything to do with them. Lord Markham's views on matrimony were distinctly correct and conventional—he wanted a "lady" to manage his house and his servants—with sufficient good looks to be an attractive personality to other men and make them envious—and, in due time, to give him an heir. Of "love" he never thought, except as a sort of idiotic sentiment affected by the "common" people among

his "set" it was voted a bore, though "souls" were tolerated in order to give the necessary spice of something "not quite proper," to stimulate idle and worthless lives. And he felt that Claudia Strange would not suit him or his surroundings.

"We should never pull together," he mused, twisting the ends of his moustache irritably. "She would want to run the whole show. Yet she has an odd fascination for me. Anyhow, I'll take her to the theatre, and see what happens next."

Accordingly to the theatre they went together. He called for her at the appointed hour, and had no need to go in the lift up to nearly the top of the sky-scraper where she had her flat, for she was ready and waiting for him in the entrance hall. Exquisitely dressed, she looked prettier and more bewitching than ever as she stepped lightly into his automobile, and smiled at him as she said she was "going to have a good time!"

"I hope so!" responded Markham, with the usual air of cautious depression which every well-bred Englishman thinks it proper to assume when others [illegible] expectant of pleasure. "I hear the [illegible] good——"

"[illegible] mind!" laughed Claudia, lightly. "Poor things, I'm sure they do their best! We mustn't be too critical—it spoils the fun!"

Markham had no reply ready. "Mustn't be too

critical" was to him an unknown view of life. From his schooldays at Eton and onwards, he had accustomed himself to find flaws in every conceivable thing—from the shape of his mother's bonnet to the latest speech in the House—every one was wrong save himself, and every form of argument erroneous save his own. So he sat by his fair companion in an almost unbroken silence during the drive to the theatre—a silence which she privately commented upon as "dull, but English."

At the play she enjoyed herself with all the zest of a child taken to its first party. The piece was not very good, and the actors struggled gallantly with unrewarding parts, while the orchestra played dismally out of tune, but Claudia found no fault at all, and, seated in the luxurious box which her lordly admirer had secured for privacy as well as comfort, talked to him between the acts with a charm, intelligence and vivacity which renewed his admiration for her, though he was reluctant to own it to himself. At last, when convenient opportunity occurred, he drew his chair a little nearer to hers, and taking up her jewelled fan played with it absently for a moment—then spoke.

"It was such a surprise for me," he said, softly, "to hear what a busy and important personage you are! Almost a controller of the money-market!"

Her clear bright eyes flashed full upon him.

" Didn't you know ? " she asked. " Well, after all, Fame *is* a bubble ! I thought I was as celebrated as Rockefeller or J. P. Morgan ! What did you take me for ? "

He smiled.

" I took you for—just a woman ! "

She nodded her head.

" That's so ! That's what I am ! "

He still toyed with the fan he held, and looked away from her.

" Not exactly ! " he said. " You are—a man of business ! "

" A *woman* of business, you mean," she retorted quickly. " It isn't necessary to be a man in order to have a little plain judgment and common sense."

" Ah ! " He shrugged his shoulders ever so slightly. " But a woman—a charming woman like yourself—is made for something sweeter and more beautiful than mere business and common sense."

" Oh, you think so ? " and Claudia laughed. " Like a box of chocolates, each sweet to be taken out and eaten according to fancy ! Yes, I know ! That's the old-time man's way of looking at the thing ! You don't like women in business ? "

" Well—" he hesitated—" hardly ! "

" No, I thought not. May I have my fan ? Thanks ! It was made by a man, and it isn't very strong."

Her eyes sparkled with subtle mischief, and the smile stayed on her lips as she spoke. But just then the curtain went up again, and she gave her whole attention to the play.

He looked at her half vexedly where she sat, and noted the clearness of her complexion, the delicious little dimple in her chin, the soft hair swept back in bright curls to the top of her well-shaped head and banded in with a circlet of diamonds—such an exquisite, fairy-like creature, and—a broker! It was preposterous! Suddenly she seemed to divine his thoughts, for she turned towards him, smiling and said—

"You may come to my office to-morrow if you like! And if you've got five hundred English pounds lying round loose doing nothing, I'll turn them into a thousand for you in seven days. How would that suit you?"

"It would suit me perfectly," he answered, with some amusement. "But I don't quite see——"

"That's just it!" she smiled. "No man *quite* sees! That's where I come in! *I* quite see!—quite!—all round and everywhere, I don't talk, smoke, or whisky-soda *my* business! A man does those sort of things—a woman doesn't."

He gave a little deprecatory laugh.

"Men do the work of the world," he observed.

"Some of it—not all," said Claudia, quickly,

" and what they do is often done very badly. They muddle through, but not without wars and endless horrible criminalities. If a really fine man turns up among them, they crucify him, like Christ, or doubt his genius, like Shakespeare, or want to deprecate his services, like Kitchener. And as for the 'work of the world,' how much of it do *you* undertake, for example ? "

He bit his lip, and felt his blood tingle with annoyance at her direct question. She saw his vexation, and her eyes sparkled.

" Don't bother to answer ! " she said. " You're not the only do-nothing man who thinks he's helping on civilization by preserving game and inviting his friends once a year to shoot it. Oh yes, I know ! I've been in your country often, and love it ! I've seen your place too—Markham Hall. You ought to live there always ! "

His eyebrows went up with an expression of profound indifference.

" You think so ? " he queried indolently " Why ? "

" Why ? " and she looked at him full and candidly. " Because your place and duty are there ! You have your tenantry to help with their farms and their crops—you ought to make them feel you are their friend, so that they are happy in their work and eager to bring prosperity to you as well as to

themselves. Every landowner has a gold mine in his estate if he only makes up his mind to work it."

He was silent. The last act of the play was in progress, and in a few minutes more it was finished. He assisted her to put on her cloak, and she thanked him prettily for "a charming evening." He took her home in his automobile, and when they parted she said—

"You'll come to-morrow?"

"If you wish."

"Oh, I don't particularly wish!" she answered, gaily. "But I should like to put you on a good thing. I'll keep half-an-hour for you between eleven and twelve. Good-night!"

He raised his hat, and stood bareheaded till she had disappeared within the portico of the tall Tower of Babel built up in residential flats. The white light of the full moon in the cloudless American sky made all things clearly visible, and the ugliness of his surroundings suddenly smote him with a sharp sense of memory—memory that conjured up before his eyes a vision of the stately and appealing Tudor architecture of his own home in England, with its clustering gables and mullioned windows—its smooth green lawns like stretches of velvet, fired at their edges by clumps of glorious rhododendrons—its noble park, adorned with splendid oaks

and beeches, some of which had been saplings when Henry VIII was King, and when his own ancestor had served in the train of nobles and courtiers attending at the nuptials of that fickle monarch with the fair and ill-fated Anne Boleyn. A brief sigh escaped him.

"After all," he murmured, but left the sentence unfinished as he stepped into his car and was driven back to his hotel.

Next day, yielding to the irresistible attraction which drew him on like an iron filing to a magnet, he found himself at Claudia's "office" in Wall Street. It was a big place, full of interminable passages, rooms and telephone "call" boxes—and there seemed to be no end to the number of clerks and typists male and female, all as busy as they could be. A sharp-faced boy in a kind of semi-official livery asked him whether he had an appointment, and on his replying in the affirmative, ushered him through a long series of "bureaus" to the inmost sanctuary of affairs, a small plainly furnished apartment where, at a big desk, sat the small and *mignonne* Claudia, arrayed in a neat, dark navy serge costume and holding a telephone receiver to her pretty little ear.

"So here you are!" she said, stretching out her disengaged hand to him. "Well, just sit down for a minute and wait till I get this customer rung off.

Jakes," and she addressed the office boy, " Mind, I can't see anyone now for half-an-hour."

Jakes nodded, and took his rapid departure without further ceremony.

Markham, seating himself in a rather stiff upright chair, gazed curiously about him. There was nothing to indicate the presence or influence of a woman anywhere, yet, with the strange preconceived ideas and fixed obstinacy of his temperament, he looked here and there in expectation of seeing at least a mirror, a " vanity bag," a ball of worsted and knitting needles, or even a pet dog !—but no, there was no sign of anything more than the strictest office necessities and documentary paraphernalia of the money-making male. There was just one hint of a higher grace than gold—a freshly gathered rose, lightly laid on a pile of account books as if it had been accidentally dropped there by a passing fairy. The sight of it gave him a sense of pleasure, almost of relief. Just then Claudia laid down the receiver and turned to him, smiling.

" Well ! How about that five hundred ? " she queried.

He took out his pocket-book, opened it, and handed her a cheque.

" I wrote it this morning before coming," he said. " I thought I would prove my confidence in you at once."

She glanced at the slip of paper and sat for a moment thinking.

" Let me see ! " she murmured, talking more to herself than to him. " This is Wednesday—yes !—that will do ! See now ! I'll buy for you to-day, and next Wednesday I'll sell, and you'll make a thousand for your five hundred. It will be your spec, of course—but I'll work it for you."

" You are—you are very—what shall I say ?—energetic ! " said Lord Markham, hesitatingly—" I suppose it's all fair and above-board ? "

Her clear eyes flashed sudden fire upon him.

" Fair and above-board ? I should think so, indeed ! No hanky-panky tricks here ! If I buy shares to-day that I know are going to be double their present price next week, and sell again for that double, isn't that fair and above-board ? Isn't that the way money's made ? "

" I suppose it is ! " he answered, amusedly—" But you—you seem so quick and so sure ! "

" It doesn't do to be slow in our country," said Claudia. " We haven't half enough time to live as it is. That is to say, we haven't half enough time to enjoy life. We want to make money while we're young—it's no use to us when we're too old to have any fun. You're just trying the game with a little five hundred pounds, but suppose you had placed ten thousand with me, you'd have twenty

thousand next Wednesday. See! Now let's talk!"

She left her desk, and taking an easier chair sat down opposite to him.

"Why don't you go home to England?" she asked, pointedly.

Her eyes were so clear and candid in their straight regard that without an instant's thought he answered at once.

"Because you are too attractive!"

A sudden laughter and whimsical astonishment lightened her charming face.

"I guessed that was so!" she said frankly. "Well now, if I tell you it's no use!—and that I'm not taking any, what will you say?"

"Not taking any?" he queried, smiling. "That's slang! And just now it means——"

"It means that I'm not taking any Englishman's home!" she laughed. "Now do listen! When we first met in Paris I saw you had a sort of 'wanting' on you for me, like a boy who sees a new sort of pop-gun and thinks it better than any other he's ever tried! You thought I was a little bit of feminine frippery—the kind of woman you noble lords often choose for your wives. Mind, I'm not saying I don't love fripperies! I *do*. I can pin an hour's pure joy on a hat, and I revel in a pretty frock and lovely jewels. But there are other things. For ten years

I've been making a home—a real home, you know! Where a man and woman who love each other can settle down and be happy—a home full of beautiful things drawn from the deepest wells of life!——" and, as she spoke, her eyes darkened and deepened, and the smile on her lips shadowed away to a more serious sweetness—" Books by great thinkers—pictures by great artists—furniture designed by real craftsmen who love their work—gardens where flowers can bloom freely and trees can grow strong, so that when we walk among them we can believe they thank us for making them so happy!"

" 'We,'" interrupted Markham. " 'We' means yourself and another?"

" Why yes! Another who is all me, as well as himself! Without him there wouldn't be any use in making the home—without him, I should be asking God why He made the world! You understand?"

" I think I do," he responded, quietly, " you are engaged to be married."

" That's the correct way of putting it!" she said. " It's years and years ago since we fixed it up be-between us with a hickory nutshell. He was twelve and I was ten. 'Here's half my nutshell'—he said—'You keep it—and I'll keep the other half. And we'll be married, and on our wedding day we'll join the two halves together and make it a one

again. And we'll have it fitted in a gold case all set with sparkling diamonds!' So we settled it. He's a rancher, and one of the finest men you ever saw! He's got thousands of heads of cattle, and he's making his pile while I'm making mine, and we're both putting in to the home—we've been putting in ever since we were old enough to earn—but I guess we're near joining the old hickory nutshell this summer!"

She laughed joyously, and held up a gold chain which hung round her neck, at the end of which was fastened a small brown object, highly polished from much wear.

"You see!" she added, "it's not much of an improvement on a ring broken in halves, like the love-token of the poor unfortunate Bride of Lammermoor, though *she* always seemed to me a very weak creature. No 'go' and no pluck! I should have run away to my Master of Ravenswood long before any sort of Bucklaw had a chance to look in!"

Lord Markham roused himself from a brief reverie.

"I'm sure you would!" he said. "You are very much in love!"

A pretty blush coloured her cheeks.

"I certainly am!" she admitted—"I thought *you* were, too!"

He started.

"I?"

"Yes! With me!"

He looked so utterly confounded, that she smiled and pointed a little white finger at him admonishingly

"There! Now you begin to know yourself! I don't really mean that I thought you were in love with me—I mean that *I* thought that *you* thought you were in love with me! That makes *such* a difference, you know! I knew all the time that you were *not*—you don't know what love means! You've just been looking out for a suitable wife—a woman likely to be an agreeable companion and household manager, educated enough to do the honours of your fine old place in England. But love! You haven't given it a chance in your heart or soul! Forgive me!—I know I'm speaking pretty plainly—but you're rather a pleasant sort of Englishman—though you're a bit too satisfied with yourself—and I'd like to see you making the best of life."

He smiled somewhat cynically.

"And the best—is?"

"Well, it isn't what half of your 'smart set' over in Europe take it to be," she replied, quietly and with deep earnestness. "It isn't planning all day for one's own selfish pleasure or secret intrigue.

It's just hard work, love, and loyalty! Anyhow that's what it is to *me*. Some of you Englishmen marry us American women for our dollars when we have them—and some of us American women marry you Englishmen because you have titles. That's all wrong. Dollars are no good unless you've got some one you love to spend them for—and titles are just 'bunkum' that can be bought for a few thousand pounds. They used to mean something in the very very old days, at the beginning of things, but they mean nothing now, being just 'bought honours,' and honour that's paid for is no honour at all. So you see titles don't appeal to me, though yours is all right and comes direct to you from a groom of the chambers who no doubt helped that villainous old Henry VIII in his love affairs! What *I* call the 'best of life' is, to work hard so that you have sufficient to make yourself happy, and others too—and to *love* as hard as you work! Then 'God's in His heaven, all's right with the world!'"

He looked at her animated face rather wistfully

"I'm sorry I'm too late!" he said. "For perhaps I might have learned from you—how to love!"

She smiled.

"No one can teach you that!" she answered. "It just comes!" She paused a moment—then added, playfully: "But you've got so many old-

fashioned notions that I rather wonder love isn't among them!"

"Old-fashioned notions!" he echoed. "I really think you are mistaken in me——"

"Oh no, I'm not!" she interposed, laughingly. "You are of course 'up-to-date' in the way society amuses itself—but your ideas of the relations of man and woman in the economy of progress and government are as fixed as a very rusty nail embedded in concrete! For instance, you don't like the idea of a woman dealing in stocks and shares. Now, do you?"

"Well, no!—not much!" he confessed. "It seems so unusual——"

"Yet you don't mind a woman going out charing?" pursued Claudia. "It doesn't hurt you any to see her poor hands blistered with soda suds, and her face red and swollen and spoilt with ugly effort, such as stooping over other folks' dirty floors and doorsteps? You think that's quite a suitable and 'womanly' occupation?"

He was silent, but his glance involuntarily strayed to Claudia's own pretty hands, small, well-shaped, white as milk, and adorned with one or two choice and sparkling rings.

"And you don't mind it if a woman entrusts a male broker to buy shares for her," she went on. "As long as one of your sex has a finger in the pie

it's all right! And if the male broker gives her a stupid lead and persuades her to make a stupid speculation, or cheats her out of some of her money, you say at once it's *her* fault—'women shouldn't speculate!' But when a woman takes the trouble to study and to learn the ins and outs of the world's money-markets, and uses all the foresight and instinct nature has bestowed upon her to win success for herself as well as for others without making herself physically hideous in the process—that's unwomanly!"

He fidgeted uneasily in his chair.

"You put it very bluntly," he said.

"Yes—I *am* blunt!" she admitted. "I like straight ways and straight argument. See!" and she suddenly took up the rose which Markham had noticed lying on a heap of account books. "There's a sweet, dainty flower—that's like an innocent woman when she first begins life in the land of dreams! Some of you men like to gather such a flower, wear it and crush it in the wearing, and then—when it fades—throw it away! Ah, I know! That's the master-and-slave notion, but it doesn't suit *me!* I'd—I'd rather be the half of an old hickory nutshell! and she laughed happily. "It's a hard, plain thing—but it lasts!"

She put the rose aside, got up from her chair and held out her hand.

"Time flies! Good-bye!" said she.

He got up also, a little slowly and reluctantly.

"Is it good-bye?" he asked.

"Yes, I think so!" she smiled. "Of course I'll settle accounts of your little gamble with me, and then—then——"

"Then—what?"

"Why, then, I hope you'll go straight home to beautiful England and forget all about me! You'll have had an experience of a 'new' woman, and you'll be all the better for it! Look at a dear, sweet fresh English country girl's pretty face and then fall in love! Don't think of yourself at all—only of *her!* And when you really *do* fall in[illegible] stay deep in it!—you'll never find a warmer nest to be safe and cosy and sheltered from all the v[illegible] of the world! Try, won't you? It'll do you much good!"

He took her hand and pressed it gently.

"Very well! I'll try! But I shall never forget you!"

"Won't you? Well! Perhaps not!" and she looked frankly up into his eyes—"Some folks say I'm not an easy person to forget! Besides, you've had quite a time of it, hunting me round, and trying to find out my 'business.' And now you know! You know it's just what every real woman would like to do—to earn enough money of her own to help

make beautiful the home she is going to live in with the man she loves. That's all! And as long as she does it honourably and intelligently it doesn't matter how she does it. The pre-Victorian idea was that the man should do it all, while the woman sat uselessly simpering, clothed in white muslin and affecting a general helplessness, and then when he had slaved enough and got a home together, that she should fling herself on his shoulders like a 'burgeon,' as the inimitable Mrs. Gamp says. I don't want to a 'burgeon'—I'm trying to carry part of the ;gage! I want to be the imagined lever of Archi-les and lift the world for my man! I want to be gs, light, power, brightness, joy, everything to .im! See!"

He held her hand a little longer—a little more tenderly.

"Yes," he answered, quietly. "I see! Good-bye!"

Her smile flashed up in his face like sunshine.

"Don't take it badly!" she said. "Good-bye!"

He glanced at the rose she had set aside.

"May I have it?" he asked, softly.

"Why, certainly!"

She gave it to him, coquettishly touching it with her lips as she did so. He was conscious of a quickened heart-beat.

"Too bad!" he said, smiling

"Yes! So it is! But it's just a fancy! To bring you luck—and love! Good-bye!"

Another two or three minutes, and the sharp-featured office boy had shown him out into the surging roar and rush of Wall Street. He stood for a moment, half deafened by the noise and bewildered by the movement, holding the rose in his hand with the abstracted air of a child who has plucked a flower without knowing what it is. Then he saw his automobile approaching, and entering it was driven back to the Astor House.

He saw Claudia no more. Within the week he received, as she had promised, his five hundred pounds doubled into a thousand—but no word came from her, personally, to accompany the formal note of settlement. And, having nothing further to expect or to hope for, he made his preparations for returning to England. Just before leaving New York, however, he chanced to visit an art-gallery where there were some very fine examples of sculpture by a young Roman artist, who, discarding the criminal perversions of modern taste, had evidently founded his methods of work on the unrivalled Greek models One statue in particular struck his fancy, called "The Rancher"—the life-size figure of a man in the act of throwing a lasso. The alert, proud, eager form in the rough "down west" attire was superb —the face exceptionally fine in feature and bold in

expression. The more he looked at it the more he fancied it, and finally he decided to purchase it for the gallery at Markham Hall. But when he came to ask the price, he was told it was not for sale

"It's a very fine piece of work," said the art dealer. "One of the finest this new man has yet done. But it's a commission, and we're only allowed to exhibit it as a favour. It belongs to Claudia Strange."

Lord Markham winced ever so slightly.

"The lady stock-broker?" he queried, with a forced smile.

"That's it! I *think*—I'm not quite sure!—that it's the statue of an intimate friend of hers—done from the life."

Markham nodded.

"I see! Her future husband, perhaps?"

"I couldn't say! Maybe. But I don't know. All *my* business is to see that it goes down safely to her place in the country when we've done showing Nothing else you'd like?"

"No, thanks!" and Markham looked long and with a curious sense of resentment at the fine, lithe white marble figure towering above him on its pedestal, the very embodiment of splendid manhood. Claudia's words rang thrillingly in his ears—"I want to be the imagined lever of Archimedes and lift the world for my man! I want to be wings, light, power, brightness, joy, everything to him! See!"

Yes, he saw! And for the first time a glimmering guess of the true nature of a great love dawned upon him—for the first time his own ways of life seemed unutterably poor and mean, and the vague chronic boredom of his "set" in England depressed him like the shadow of an approaching cloud. There *was* joy to be found in life—more joy than he had ever known, if one could only attune one's self to meet it!

Yet, somehow he never found the keynote of the melody. The light of a visionary Paradise which had momentarily flashed across his mind with Claudia's words, soon vanished on his return to England. Convention, and the terrible vagueness of thought and speech which, like a blight, characterizes English social life, gradually enveloped him in its mental mist and rain once more, and he sank easily back into the old familiar ruts of habit such as every nobly-born Britisher makes for himself and wherein he loves to remain. Starched, stiff and severely accurate in outward conduct and speech, with only occasional lapses from the path of moral rectitude, of which his world knew nothing, he passed his days languidly and uselessly enough, in sublime indifference to most happenings, and never married, because firstly, it was too much trouble, and secondly, because he was convinced no woman would exactly suit him

Only once again did he hear of Claudia, and that

was when she sent him her wedding cards. Then she passed out of his life, though not entirely out of his memory, and when a friend just over from the States talked to him one day of a successful speculation he had lately made and mentioned the "famous" stock-broking firm of "Strange and Co." he was not surprised.

"A woman manages the concern," said his informant—"and manages it well, too! She married the other day, and they say her husband is a millionaire twice over! No wonder, if his wife works his business for him!"

"No wonder!" murmured Markham, lazily—"Some women are very clever."

"They are!" assented his friend—"No doubt about it! And, by Jove, Markham, they've got their chance of an innings now!"

Lord Markham looked at him quizzically across the top of the newspaper he was reading.

"Think so?" he queried—"Well! what then?"

"Why, we shall have a changed world—that's all! And the Book of Genesis will have to be revised!"

Markham laughed.

"It's time!" he said—"It's had rather too long a run of public favour!"

"You believe we should accept women as our equals? Mentally and intellectually?"

"For our own comfort and convenience I don't

believe we should," answered Markham. "But, whether we like it or not, I'm afraid we must. 'The race is to the swift and the battle to the strong'—and just now women are proving themselves both swift and strong. Their goal is in sight."

"I thought you entirely condemned the idea of female equality with man," said the other.

"So I do!" declared Markham, emphatically. "If I had my own natural way I would have a woman obey me to the letter or I'd know the reason why! I have all the love of tyranny in me common to our sex. But—it won't do! Father Abraham has had his day, and we can't turn our Hagars into the wilderness with impunity. So I resign myself to the inevitable."

"That's why you don't marry?"

"Exactly. That's why I don't marry."

His friend laughed.

"Lucky escape for some woman, if those are your sentiments!"

Lord Markham's eyes lifted themselves slightly under his heavy eyelids.

"Quite right! A lucky escape for some woman."

The conversation ended. And Markham partook of his usual grilled cutlet in his usual corner of the club at his usual table, in lonely state, and tried not to think of the wings, light, power, brightness, and joy "some woman" was to—another man!

REJECTED!

THE STORY OF A PICTURE

A BARE, comfortless room with a top-light—a room large enough to be called by courtesy a "studio,"—and a worn, haggard-faced man, gifted enough to be called without courtesy an "artist," these are among the daily commonplaces of London, and the writer of this tale makes apology for intruding them afresh upon the wearied public, already over-familiar with the sordid aspect they present. Yet sometimes, despite the sordidness, a wonder of art breaks forth from these unlovely surroundings, even as a gloriously-winged butterfly breaks from a chill worm-like chrysalis, and for years upon suffering years Wilfrid Turner had hoped against hope to produce something—anything—that might command not only the attention and admiration of so-called "connoisseurs" in art, but purchasers as well. For he was desperately poor; he had lived a half-starved life for the sake of the dreams within his brain—and he had painted pictures so unlike the pictures of "popular" painters,

that ordinary people who wanted " things to hang up " on their walls, were afraid to buy them lest they should be accused by some pompous critic of " false taste in art." False taste or otherwise, many private art lovers had a sneaking admiration for Wilfrid Turner's work—they liked his bold conceptions—his noble and splendid breadth of colour—and they would say kindly yet hesitatingly that it was " very fine !—but—well ! perhaps—was it a little too *much* colour ? "—ought it not to be " more subdued in tone and treatment " ? and so on. Meanwhile the man himself hungered and thirsted—his visions fed his soul, but his body was a lean and unsatisfied creature—almost wolfish in its craving for an all-round satisfying meal. The few small studies he was able to dispose of to rapacious dealers for some casual pounds here and there, just barely kept a roof over his head and supplied his necessary painting materials—but for all creature comforts he had to grind himself down to the smallest possible limit. He had relatives, and one or two good friends, but he would have scorned to ask any of them for assistance. He had made his own bed and was prepared to lie upon it, even though it were all thorns.

Just now he stood before his easel, his attention divided between the large, finished canvas upon it and a square, flat packing-case which, heavily

insured, had arrived from the North of Scotland that morning. The packing-case stood up on its narrow end, its addressed label turned towards him, and every now and then he found himself reading his own name upon it with a curious fascination. Then, removing his gaze from it, he would look at his picture—a fine rendering of a sudden squall at sea. The waves, riding over each other's backs, were powerfully and truthfully drawn—boldly depicted both in form and colour, so that they almost appeared to break out of the canvas in living, rushing foam—and he knew that he had done well. Without any poor pride, he felt that he had realized his best self in his work, and his artistic conscience was as satisfied as ever any artistic conscience can be.

"But it's all no use!" he said, with a sigh which he quickly checked and turned into a yawn. "Even if it were the greatest thing done this year, David would keep it out."

The man he thought of, Ambrose David, was an R.A., and a member of the Academy Council—he had, by dint of sheer push, impudence and "touting for notice" and patronage, succeeded in trampling his way to the front. His painting was bad—meretricious and "glazey," with the weak kind of "finish" one sees on a cheap oleograph, but it was, as the suburban young lady would

say, "soft," and for "soft" folks effective. He was a jealous little man; having come of a common stock he had not escaped the heritage of a common mind, full of small spite and envy. From the first he had realized that if once a work of Wilfrid Turner's was "passed" by the council, it might possibly be the making of a new and great name in the art world. This he determined to prevent by every means in his power—such means as are employed every day. He had a voice—a rough one and a coarse one—and he could make it heard. He also had a whisper—a sibilant, suggestive whisper, and he could make that heard also. He had used both voice and whisper against Wilfrid Turner to suit his own purposes—in the Art Clubs and out of them—at studios and beyond them—and not a member of the Academy Council but had heard his playful pleasantries concerning "poor Turner" whom he called "an inspired ass."

"He'd beat us all," he would say, with well-affected enthusiasm, "if he'd only give full rein to his imagination. Of course he would! He'd be the wonderful Wilfrid!—Turner the Second!"

Not a word of this outburst was meant—it was all expressed as a "show" of kindness and generosity to a fellow-artist. Wilfrid Turner knew this as well as any man, and was fully aware that so long as Ambrose David remained a member of

the Academy Council, so long would every picture he sent in be returned upon his hands with the usual formula—" The President and Council regret," etc. etc.

On this particular day, when he stood before his easel, his attention divided between the picture set upon it, and the packing-case cumbering up the floor within a few feet of him, his mind was occupied with many thoughts, chiefly retrospective. He recalled the time when he, as a small boy, used to spend some of his holidays with a relative in a remote part of Sutherlandshire—a great-uncle who lived by his own choice and pleasure so far away from the inhabited haunts of men that he was considered a sort of grim recluse with " a bee in his bonnet." His dwelling was an ancient castle, once famous in the history of Scottish chieftains, with walls some ten feet thick, wherein long slits showed where the bowmen of old time used to send forth arrows on the foe, and he had spent considerable sums in making the place habitable—even luxurious. Wilfrid in his imaginative teens loved both the castle and its surroundings, but most of all he loved the pictures which adorned every available foot of wall space in the stately hall and dining-room. From them he had first imbibed his taste and finally his passion for art, and his ambition had been fired by the tales his

great-uncle used to tell him of famous artists he had known and entertained years ago in the days of his youth and prime. The old man was a keen critic and fine judge of painting; and his hobby had always been the collecting of pictures, especially those by artists whom the world had not as yet entirely recognized. And now he was dead, and his collection was being sent to Christie's for sale: the only item excepted being named in his will as "One picture contained and fastened within its original packing-case as sent by the painter of the said work." There followed a minute description of the packing-case, its marks and seals were described in detail, and it was bequeathed to "my grand-nephew Wilfrid Turner, by whom alone it is to be opened and examined." There was no description of the picture, and the painter's name was not given. But the packing-case had been duly identified and dispatched to its destination, and there it stood on end awaiting the leisure and inclination of its new possessor to display its contents. He, however, was in no hurry. He had not the least expectation of finding anything wonderful or out of the common when the case should be opened: at the most he anticipated seeing some old family portrait which, whether well or ill painted, would be entrusted to him to guard as an heirloom. And he passed another hour in

adding fresh touches to his sea piece, lightening the edge of a wave here or deepening its shadows there—and playing with his brush more for the pleasure he found in the action than for any actual necessity of further work, till at last, yielding to a sudden impulse of curiosity, mingled with something of irritable impatience, he threw aside his brush, took a hammer and chisel from a shelf at hand and proceeded to open the case. Breaking the seals was a task of a few minutes—he noticed they were fairly fresh, and stamped with his relative's crest and motto—but he had to hammer away for a considerable time before he could wrench out the nails which closed the case firmly in on all sides. Presently, however, after much vexatious effort he got it open, and found, fastened to the inside wrapping of thick brown paper, which protected the picture within, a letter addressed to himself. It ran as follows:—

"DEAR WILFRID,—

"Though I have not seen you for many years, and have become too old and too selfish to take interest in your life struggles, I liked you as a boy, and in remembrance of that liking and the talks on 'art' we had together in those early days, I leave you my greatest treasure. The accompanying picture was painted especially for my

father by J. W. Turner, and was sent to him direct from the painter himself in this same packing-case where it has always remained. It is perhaps the finest thing he ever did, but no one has ever seen it or heard of it save myself. My father would never hang it on his walls, lest the light should rob it of any of its wonderful colours—and I have followed my father's example. You will therefore find the picture as fresh as if it were painted yesterday and the frame in as good condition as if it had just left the maker's hands. I need not tell you that its value can scarcely be estimated—it is worth a small fortune, which I hope you may realize and enjoy. It should find an owner who knows how to appreciate it."

The letter ended abruptly, with the signature of the writer—and Wilfrid Turner laid it down, drawing a long breath of wonderment. He looked at the thick brown-paper wrappings which concealed a possible marvel of art ;—he hardly dared touch them to uncover what, if all were true, might prove a veritable mine of gold to him who had so long scraped the earth for copper. He stood tranced for some moments in thought—then, rousing himself, bent over the packing-case and with slow caution gradually lifted the picture out and placed it, wrappings and all, on a spare easel near the one

on which his own canvas was set. Then, with eager fingers and a heart beating more quickly than usual, he undid the coverings one by one till at last he came upon the picture itself, its glass protected in the usual way by strips of brown paper pasted across it. With a wet sponge he soon succeeded in removing these, and the "treasure" was revealed in all its glory. An exclamation of delight broke from his lips—his relative was not mistaken—it was a priceless gem of art—one of those wonderful effects of light and shade and sun and sea for which Turner was and is famous. Larger than any water-colour he had ever seen by the same artist, it looked as though it had just come from Turner's own hand, and as he moved it into the best possible light and examined it carefully a sudden idea leaped into his brain—a daring idea which in its first flashing light moved him to laughter.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed. "I'll do it! If only for the fun of the thing! Yes—I'll do it!—and if it succeeds, the R.A. and I will cry 'quits' for evermore! It will be the best joke of the year!"

His eyes sparkled—his worn features brightened—hope and a sense of humorous pleasure in the situation made him feel young again. He covered his precious possession carefully from the light,

and went out of his studio with a buoyant step, feeling as though he walked on air. And at a neighbouring restaurant, he ordered quite a good luncheon ungrudgingly—he could afford it now, he thought, with a smile—in fact—if all went well he could afford a good many things!

One week later all the pictures for the annual Royal Academy Exhibition were "sent in" and the Council "sat on them" in the usual way, metaphorically and materially. It was a tedious business, and those concerned in it displayed more boredom than interest. Of course all works by the members of the Royal Academy itself were safe enough, and these in their grand total were more than sufficient to fill all the best positions on the walls of Burlington House. The "outsiders" who were neither R.A.'s nor A.R.A.'s had but the faintest ghost of a chance—their pictures were passed along in hasty review, and among them came two, sent by Wilfrid Turner—one a seascape in oils—the other a strange and brilliant water-colour drawing entitled "The Dying Day."

There was a brief hesitation among the Council as this last picture was set before them for consideration—a pause of uncertainty. Surely there was something very striking and original about it? Ambrose David leaned forward, looking at it with a compassionate smile.

"Turner again!" he said, ironically. "Poor chap! That sunset is too bad! He's been trying to imitate his great namesake—and a very poor imitation it is!"

"I don't quite agree with you," said another Academician seated next to him. "Of course it's a pity he should imitate—but the picture looks to me good enough to be the work of the original master!"

David laughed.

"Oh, come now! You're a better judge than that! Look at that confusion of cloud and colour! Wilfrid all over! He has no conception of 'tone.'"

There was still some hesitation—then, with a few more lightly-mocking, seeming kindly remarks from Ambrose David, the picture was moved on and off the scenes—rejected as hopelessly as the great sea-scape on which Wilfrid Turner had spent nearly a year of his life and thought.

In due course he received the usual civil formula: "The President and Council regret," etc., etc., and few among the thousands of the "rejected" ever received the announcement of their doom with such joy and such hilarious peals of laughter. Not for many a long day had he enjoyed himself so thoroughly, and it was some time before he could settle himself down to the practical continuance of his "joke."

" 'The President and Council regret'!" he soliloquized, in mirthful reverie. "Yes! I should think they *will* 'regret'! To some purpose! By Jove! They'll never cease to 'regret'!"

And very soon all the art-world was set talking. A lengthy paragraph appeared in the Press headed "Amusing Incident! An unknown work by Turner is rejected by the Royal Academy!" The whole story of the picture was fully related—when it was painted, and how it was "commissioned"—every detail of its history was explained with close accuracy, the narrative winding up with the practical joke played by its present owner on the Royal Academy Council. People laughed and gossiped—it was an art "sensation"!—hundreds of dejected painters with work thrown back on their hands perked up their heads and smiled—and presently the murmur of amusement and interest became a loud and constant buzz of excitement—where was the picture?—when could it be seen? Who was Wilfrid Turner, the fortunate possessor of the greater Turner's work? What had *he* done in the way of painting? Was there any picture of his own to be seen? Oh no! His work had also been "rejected"! Well, what of that? Perhaps after all his genius was unrecognized—he might be nearly as good an artist as the glorious J. W. T. himself!—who could tell? And the mirthful com-

ments went on, running like quicksilver through every quarter where "art" matters were discussed or dealt with; members of the Academy Council heard but refused to believe, and maintained in dignified silence their private wrath and incredulity. Only one of their number could not contain his fury—this was Ambrose David, who poured himself out like a flask of vitriol wherever he went and wherever anybody would listen to him. The big "advertisement" given to Wilfrid Turner gratis, not only for the legacy of the picture bequeathed to him, but for the little comedy he had played with it, was proving far more valuable than being "hung on the line"—and the storm of chatter whirled through the brilliant commencement of the London "season," especially during the first and second weeks in May when Burlington House threw open its doors to the fashionable crowd—a staring, criticizing, and for the most part wholly bored throng, many among them being only too delighted to have something new to talk about, so that before he himself knew or realized the position, there arose a demand for pictures by Wilfrid Turner—"the man who has got the real Turner"—the would-be purchasers explained. Dealers approached him respectfully by letter and by personal application—much to his contemptuous amusement—but for the moment he refused to sell a single drawing.

The excitement became intensified, and reached its culminating point when it became known that the hitherto unknown, unseen real Turner masterpiece was to be sold at Christie's at the end of the month. The public read the news and waited open-eared and almost open-mouthed for the result.

On the appointed day never was there seen a greater crowd than that which squashed and squeezed its way into the famous sale-rooms.

"The Dying Day," by J. W. Turner, was the chief object of interest that had gathered them all together—and a long, low murmur of astonishment and admiration rose from all assembled as the exquisite drawing, a gem of perfect colouring, was set up on view.

"Rejected by the Academy Council!" said a man near the auctioneer's desk—"you've heard the story?"

A ripple of laughter answered him—every one knew the joke. The bidding started at two thousand guineas—but rose quickly by leaps and bounds, till it reached twelve thousand.

"Twelve thousand!" cried the auctioneer, with considerable excitement—"Twelve——"

"Thirteen thousand!"

"Fourteen!" put in a well-known dealer, quietly.

"Fifteen!" exclaimed another.

"Fifteen five hundred!"

"Sixteen thousand guineas!" said the dealer who had before spoken.

The hammer fell—the picture was sold.

"Going to America, of course!" said a bystander, *sotto voce.*

The successful dealer looked round, with a smile.

"Yes — quite right!" he said — "going to America."

Another picture came up for sale. It was the seascape by Wilfrid Turner. He had sent it to take its chance.

"What's that? It's a fine thing!"

"That's by the man who tricked the R.A.!"

"It's his own work. It was 'rejected'!"

Another laugh rippled through the crowd. The bidding began.

"'A Sudden Squall,'—by Wilfrid Turner—painted for this year's Academy and rejected. Five hundred guineas!"

"Eight hundred!"

"One thousand!"

"One thousand five hundred!"

"Two thousand!"

The bidding stopped. The purchaser, a well-known American agent, smiled.

"Good!" he said, softly to a friend who accompanied him—"I've an offer of three thousand for it—not bad profit! And it's a fine picture! He can

sell anything he likes just now, while his name's on the wind!"

The day came to an end. The excitement was over—and Wilfrid Turner was a rich man, with bright prospects for the future opening out before him. Meeting him at one of the art clubs, Ambrose David confronted him with a dark frown.

"You call yourself a man of principle!" he said—"And you 'boom' yourself by cheating the Academy Council!"

Wilfrid looked him over calmly and lit a cigarette.

"You have cheated yourselves"—he answered—"you hardly ever look at the work of 'outsiders'—something like eight thousand pictures were rejected this year. You don't mean to tell me that the Council have conscientiously examined those eight thousand? In your unjust haste you might easily reject a masterpiece. Besides"—and he paused—"if I have played a little trick on you all, it's not as bad as stabbing a man in the back! *You* know more about that than I do!"

With that he went—and shortly afterwards left England for Paris. There he worked—there he still works—there his pictures are "hung" in the *Salon*, and receive such praise as they merit, though he is not known as Wilfrid Turner, but by a *nom de guerre* which he has rendered famous. In the house of a multi-millionaire on the other side of

the Atlantic, the wonderful Turner he once possessed has a small perfectly lighted room all to itself, and its owner never tires of pointing out its manifold beauties to his many friends.

"Yes!" he says—"It's the finest Turner in the world!—lost to sight for fifty or more years at least! There's not another like it—Ruskin would have knelt down before it in adoration! And of course you know what happened when it first came to light? It was sent up as a modern picture by a modern artist—ha-ha-ha!—a good take-in!—and it was rejected!—think of it!—rejected by the Royal Academy! Curious people the British!—very curious! They hardly know a valuable thing when they see it—and when they do find out what it's worth, they sell it to *Us*! Ha-ha-ha!"

And his laughter is echoed by his audience—laughter that runs away into silence—the silence that Art loves best.

" SUNNY "

A RED CROSS INCIDENT

SUNNY was twenty-one. He had celebrated his " coming-of-age " by a big ball given at his father's house in one of the loveliest island resorts frequented by fashionable New York society. It was a feast of flowers and fireworks. His handsome face, lithe figure and delightfully boyish smile had won all hearts, and girls fell promptly in love with him at first sight, quite apart from his prospects as heir to a millionaire's possessions. He had danced into his majority with a fair-haired little beauty of sixteen to whom he had whispered " soft nothings " in the pauses of the waltz-quadrille—and then—two months afterwards he had sailed for Europe with a big contingent of United States troops, to help fight the Monster-Criminal of the world—the Boche-Dragon far worse than any legendary beast of old-time fable. He was an only child ; his mother adored him, and from earliest baby days had called him her " sunshine "—a name which had easily chimed itself into " Sunny " with

screen, and a lovely woman stepped forward like a vision in fairyland.

" Sunny! My own Sunny!"

" Mother!"

She folded him in her arms.

" I've been here for weeks, my boy!" she murmured—" They told me to come directly they found you on the field—my poor, darling brave boy All the work of the American Red Cross, Sunny! —the splendid American Red Cross! It has saved you!—and me!"

THE PANTHER

A CONQUEST OF HEREDITY

NIGHT had closed in upon the tropical forest. The giant trees, unmoved by a breath of wind, were scarcely visible in the thick darkness which had fallen with the suddenness common to far southern latitudes. The intense suffocating heat seemed to crush and melt as in a crucible all the strange pungent odours of the rank and luxuriant vegetation, filling what little air there was with poisonous and sickening exhalations. It was one of Nature's dark and cunning corners—a place never frequented by man, and fertile in the breeding of pestilential vapours and germs of deadly disease, ready to destroy the unfit, when the time for their appearance should come To an inattentive ear there would have seemed utter silence everywhere; but, to the keen listener a steady, almost rhythmic wave of sound swept to and fro—the mysterious beat of the life pulse in swarms of insect, bird and animal creatures hidden among the thickets of fern and bush more intricately entangled than any

barrier devised by human wit against a stealthily encroaching foe. Presently a flicker of emerald light pierced the dense gloom, as though some vast being walking through the sky had swung a lantern downward to illumine the way; it was a side glimmer of the moon, peering among the boughs, intensifying their close blackness. As this ghostly gleam shone pallidly there came a slow rustling movement in the forest as of something pushing under the low growing brambles—the branches crackled, and a dark, sinuous form crept swiftly along, bending now this way, now that, till breaking by force through a wall of brushwood, it raised its head and uttered a half savage, half melancholy howl. Where it had paused, there was an opening in the arching roof of foliage, and the moon looked down upon it; the moon was familiar with all the beasts of prey in that fever-haunted wilderness, and this one was no stranger to its tropic glare—a superb panther which for many nights had wandered restlessly in search of its mate, the tantalizing female creature that with true feminine coquetry had eluded this fierce lover. Again and again the wild howl echoed through the stillness, followed by a swift scurrying noise—the stampede of the smaller animals afraid of this monster whose huge fangs spared nothing. All at once, with a rapidity more instantaneous than a flash of lightning, there came

a great impetuous rush as of some heavy body throwing itself forward—an angry roar—and the brightening moonlight showed a second panther, which at first pouncing and tearing up the ground in its rage suddenly stood still—then crouched low, glaring at its fellow-brute—and, lashing its tail ominously like a whip of iron, prepared to spring. The other waited, ready for attack and rigidly drawn up on the defensive. The moonbeams now growing strong in their green and white luminance filtered through the branches, fully disclosing the lithe forms of the two powerful beasts preparing for conflict. A little distance away from them a patch of brighter light falling on a litter of dead leaves and moss showed a smaller, more supple animal gliding cautiously into the deeper shadows. This creature moved with a velvety softness—something secret and subtle marked its pace, and as it became lost in cavernous darkness it gave utterance to a whining cry, half tender, half fretful. This sound was the very herald's trump of combat; the two males heard what to them was the resistless call of amorous desire, and leaping almost erect, they sprang furiously at each other. With merciless fangs and claws they grappled together, snarling and yelling as they sometimes stood up, half locked in a deadly struggle, and anon rolled on the ground, each one striving to get at the other's throat, rip-

ping each other's flesh with a ferocity that grew more and more uncontrollable as they tasted blood and wallowed in it. The ground seemed to sway with the force of their terrific impact, and in the very thick of the fight the whimpering feminine cry resounded once more through the forest, giving fresh impetus to the insatiate cruelty and pitilessness of the wild beast nature. The moon smiled like the bland white face of an eyeless statue, showing no expression; and the stirless trees were as titanic sentinels in the dark, moving no leaf or twig to challenge the faintest quiver of the hot air, now laden with the scent of blood. At last, one of the combating brutes showed signs of exhaustion—little by little it gave way under the repeated onslaughts of its opponent, and presently with a cry that was almost human in its desperation it ceased altogether to struggle and rolled over among the ferns and bush, stone dead. Its conqueror, trampling on its body, exultantly tore at its throat with all the instinctive knowledge of the vulnerability of the jugular vein, and, satisfied at last, stood lashing its tail in savage triumph, and uttering roar after roar, proudly proclaimed to the forest-world the death of a rival. The roar was answered by the insidious whinnying call of the female, which echoing softly from safe distance was almost an appeal—the victorious beast turned

quickly in the direction of that attractive sound and with velvet tread and blood-dripping jaws, crawled rapidly into the further silence and darkness to meet the reward of love after murder. The moon smiled on complacently, and the tall trees remained stiff as moveless mists against the black ocean of the night—mysterious hungry creatures small and great crept or ran from their holes and burrows to settle on the great dead panther that lay among the bushes and thorns, and drink its blood while the veins were yet warm. Uncouth night birds awoke and flapped their wings and uttered strange croaking sounds of desire or satisfaction—an ape or two, startled from some hidden lair, swung up on the tough branches of climbing and twisted parasites and chattered like indiscreet humans who know not what they say, save in the repeating of idle rumour—and over all the dark wild scene there hung the everlasting sense of Desire and Death!—Desire, which brutalizes, because it is of self:—Death which dignifies, because Self is no more.

* * * * *

In the smoking-room of a London club two men sat talking. They were old friends, and had been boys at the same school together. They had gone up to Oxford at the same time, and in later days had fought together side by side in a veritable

hell of fire bombs, performing deeds of magnificent heroism which had won for them both the Victoria Cross as well as the " Croix de Guerre " from their French Allies. They had not finished fighting yet, but were home on leave, each man having a special reason for the respite, of which, however, they had said nothing to one another. They were—each in his own way—more than commonly good-looking. The elder of the two had a peculiarly strong face, with brilliant greenish-grey eyes half hidden under heavy lids and deep brows—the rather sinister lines of mouth and jaw were partially softened by a tawny moustache which admiring women called " golden-brown." When the lips smiled they parted to show white teeth very strongly and evenly set, and unkind people said that Major Chisholm only smiled with his teeth and never with his whole face, the eyes always keeping a grave and somewhat watchful sternness of expression under the massive brows. His friend, Walter Bruce, the Captain of the gallant Company, was of an entirely different type. Young and boyish, with laughing blue eyes and a curly mass of dark brown locks which his mother loved to fondle, he was a spoilt and petted only son. His father possessed great estates and vast wealth, and from his childhood he had known nothing but ease and luxury, the pleasures of sport, society and good living. Yet,

when brought to the test he had proved himself a hero of undaunted mettle—he had roughed it with his men—and had saved many of them at the risk of his own life—he had " played about " among bursting shells and flaming shrapnel as a child among tossing shuttlecocks, and was constantly getting " mentioned in despatches," which he declared was absurd and superfluous.

" I haven't really done anything "—he would say with almost an injured air to his military chief—" Any of my Tommies would do as much every moment of the day if they got the chance."

He had been " decorated," as he playfully asserted, by a slight wound in the arm, and had come home to have it nursed and healed by his adoring mother, while his equally adoring father looked on; but now he was fully recovered and ready to return to the scene of action. Only—there were just a few things to do first.

" I say, old man ! " he began, suddenly, opening his blue eyes full on the dark, meditative face of Chisholm opposite to him—" What are you going to do with yourself for the next few days ? "

Major Chisholm met his inquiring look with a slight smile.

" Why do you ask ? " he counter-queried. " What are your own plans ? "

"Well, I'm going into the country to stay with some friends——"

"So am I"—interrupted Chisholm, still smiling.

"Oh, are you? That's all right! Whereabouts?"

"Surrey."

"Surrey? Curious! I'm bound for Surrey too!" He paused a moment, flushed rosily like a girl—then laughed a little awkwardly. "I don't see why I shouldn't make a clean breast of it! I'm ——I'm going to be married!"

Chisholm raised his heavy eyelids, and his eyes, steely grey with the strange greenish glitter in them, opened in wide surprise.

"You? Not really! What a sly chap you are! You've never said a word to me about it!"

"No—but I didn't mean to be sly. You see, Eustace," and drawing his chair closer he laid a hand on his friend's arm with an almost coaxing fondness—"it was just this way—I thought it best to say nothing. I might have been finished off any moment in that last affair, and no one would have been any the wiser or sadder. It didn't seem fair to the girl to tie her up to me by any sort of promise or engagement, and I really meant still to wait—but when I came home a fortnight ago, she seemed so glad to see me and looked so lovely and sweet that I—well!—I just lost my head and told her all I'd been thinking

about her out there in that hell—and then it turned out she'd been thinking the same of me! So we told our respective and respectable parents, and it's all settled. The wedding will be very quiet—no one but our own people—only of course I must have you to be my best man!"

"Delighted!" and Chisholm smiled—"But who's the lady?"

"You know her quite well"—replied Bruce—"You've met her several times and admired her—Sylvia Brooke—old General Harvey Brooke's only daughter."

Chisholm rose abruptly from his chair, turning his back to his friend as he did so.

"Really! Sylvia Brooke!" he said, somewhat unsteadily, striking a match with a sharp sputter to light a cigar—"The sylph with the gold hair and pansy-coloured eyes!"

"That's her!" said young Bruce, delightedly—"She *is* the loveliest thing ever made, isn't she?"

Eustace Chisholm swung round, cigar in mouth, and standing full height looked down upon his friend reclining comfortably in the easy chair.

"Yes, I suppose she is—" he answered slowly—"*You* think so, of course!"

"And so do you!" declared Bruce—"Why, you were almost in love with her yourself at one time!"

"Was I?" The glitter of the even white teeth

shone for a moment under the tawny moustache. " Positively, now I come to remember it, I believe I was ! "

His massive upright figure seemed just then to tower over the indolently reclining, handsome young man like a looming shadow. Walter Bruce leaned his curly head back on the cushion of his chair half-closing his eyes.

" She is such a darling little soul ! " he murmured, lazily—" You know what sweet eyes she has, and what lovely hair ! No angel in Heaven could look prettier than Sylvia, I'm sure ! And she's fond of me—that's the most astonishing part of the whole business ! I should never have thought it ! I should have given her credit for better taste ! You see she might so easily have cared for *you* ! "

" She might ! " and Chisholm flicked off the end of his cigar, turning towards the fireplace to do so—" But in this case the unlikely has not happened ! "

He changed his attitude again, and resumed his contemplative observation of his friend, who smiled confidingly up at him and stretched himself out with a comfortable yawn. Young Bruce wore rather an open collar, and a portion of his full white throat was bare. On that uncovered bit of soft flesh Chisholm's eyes were fixed with a curious intentness.

" No more unlikely than her caring for me "—

went on Bruce, dreamily—" You're really the sort of fellow that generally takes a girl's fancy—and you danced with her at our county ball. You moved splendidly together!—and by Jove!—how pretty she looked! She wore a sparkling fairy frock with a sort of misty rose colour about it—*you* know! like a bit of pale sunset cloud; and she seemed to float about in your arms as lightly as gossamer! We all thought you made such a good-looking couple—don't you remember?"

Chisholm nodded, puffing at his cigar in hard, nervous impatience. Did he remember? As if he could ever forget! And now, an evil hour had come upon him, which, like a sudden tidal wave of utter despair, swamped every aspiration and ambition of his life. For months, in the horrors and suspense of war, he had held the memory of Sylvia Brooke's exquisite face and eyes as the beckoning bright reward of victory, when victory came—night and day he had thought of her; and the thrill of her touch when he had danced with her, as Bruce had just said, clung to him with an insidious sweetness as sacred as it was tender. All his hopes had been secretly set on winning her love—and he had resolved to go and see her this very week and test his chance—too late—too late! This curly-headed young hero, his own familiar friend, had all unwittingly stolen a march upon him—and as he stood, outwardly

calm, but inwardly raging with fierce and feverish trouble, he was tormented by a strange and terrible suggestion—a kind of overpowering instinct at first so awful to his mind that he repelled it with horror, but gradually strengthening and filling every nerve and sinew with purely brutal force. He loved Sylvia!—love?—the word was too weak to cover the passion which dominated him—stronger now than ever for having been pent up within him for so many weary months of absence and silence, while he had fought face to face with Death in all its most hideous forms. He loved Sylvia!—he wanted her; she was necessary to his life, and now he was to be deprived of her! Why should he suffer this loss? What had he done to deserve it? Thoughts, bitter and resentful, crowded hotly into his brain, and slowly, very slowly and gradually there grew up in him a confused sense of animal greed, animal ferocity, animal lust of blood, till suddenly he hated—yes, hated the fair, boyish-looking comrade of his school and college days—the happy prosperous fellow to whom capricious destiny had given all the goods and glories of life, withholding nothing. And his brooding eyes bent themselves with a pertinacity of which he was unconscious, on that glimpse of the young man's throat left open by the soft collar and careless tie. Then there began a dull buzzing in his ears like the

noise of a whirring wheel and clear above this a hissing whisper slid along the channels of his mind—" Kill ! kill ! " One quick, close grasp on that throat—one deft throttling twist of the hand and clutching fingers ! The cigar he was smoking tasted acrid and nauseous —he flung it aside,—then straightening his figure to its full height, he said with a forced smile :—

" Well, old man, shall we be moving ? It's getting late—you might come round to my rooms for half-an-hour and discuss this wedding business. If you really want me to support you on the great occasion I must know day, hour and all the rest of it. But I wish you'd let me off it ! "

Bruce sprang up from his chair, momentarily vexed and pained.

" Let you off ! " he echoed, amazed—" You, my best friend ? Why ? "

" Why ? Oh, chiefly, I think, because a 'best man' always looks such a fool ! A sort of hanger-on—like the footman holding the straps of a state coach on Lord Mayor's Day ! "

Bruce laughed. " You're a queer chap ! But I can't let you off, Eustace !—you are more to me than anyone else in the world after my own folk and —and Sylvia. Come on—let's go to your diggings —one can't talk these sort of things over in a club. In fact, I'm quite afraid to mention Sylvia's name in any public place, there's such a lot of fellows in

love with her. And of course they'll all hate *me!*"

"Why?" asked Chisholm, abruptly.

"Oh, it's perfectly natural they should! Every man hates the one who has got the girl he wants!"

They left the smoking-room, took their hats and coats and walked out together into the dark streets. It was a still, warm summer's night, and a few stars had made their dim appearance through the hot murky mist of the London sky, while now and again a brilliant searchlight played its long, radiating beams upward and downward to all four points of the compass. Chisholm looked covertly at his companion from time to time, noticing the buoyancy of his steps and the air of confident attainment and delight which marked his whole bearing—and again the wicked insidious whisper—"Kill! kill!" hissed in his ears. A pained, sick abhorrence of himself moved him.

"What am I?" he thought, desperately—"A reasoning man, or an unreasoning brute? How dare I even hint to my own consciousness the possible death of my friend?—the brave fellow who has been beside me in the thick of the fight and whom I loved better than myself but an hour ago! All for a woman's sake!—a woman's eyes and smile!—a woman's beauty, as perishable as a flower! Sylvia Brooke! Are there no other women?"

And some lines of Swinburne ran catchingly into his memory—

There are fairer women I hear—that may be—
But I, that I love you and find you fair
Who are more than fair in my eyes, if they be,
Do the high gods know, or the great gods care?

"I say, Eustace!" broke out Bruce at this moment—"Wouldn't it be a sell, if after all I got finished off?"

Chisholm gave a quick nervous movement.

"Finished off? What do you mean?"

"Why, when I go back to the front, a married man—suppose a sniper has me? or a shell?—or even a bit of shrapnel? Nice thing for Sylvia!"

"If you think along those lines you'd better put off the wedding"—said Chisholm, curtly.

"Exactly what I told *her*, but bless her heart, she won't hear of it. 'I love you and I'll be your wife *now*,' she said—'I'll have you while I can!'" He laughed joyously, unaware of the deadly pallor of his companion's face. "And perhaps—after all—it's best! It's the old French song over again—'A little laughter—a little love—and then—*Bon soir*!' A bit hard on lovers—still——"

A sharp pang of compunction and shame ran through the heart of the man beside him. He spoke quickly, though his voice was hoarse and unsteady.

"Don't look on the dark side, dear boy!" he said—"You've everything to hope for—and nothing to regret. You—you deserve to be happy. Here we are!"

He stopped at a door in St. James's Street—it was a house of 'Bachelor flats' and the porter was on duty. As they passed him, Chisholm said:—

"Captain Bruce will be coming down again in about half an hour."

The porter touched his cap. He was a patient man, accustomed to sit up o' nights uncomplainingly. Meanwhile Chisholm was thinking:—

"Will Captain Bruce be coming down? *Will* he? *Shall* he?"

His mind was like a dark whirlpool, surging round and round in black eddies, yet there seemed a white spot in the midst of the blackness, a white, soft pulsing thing like a man's throat, easily gripped so that its pulsation should stop for ever. They went up the stairs together—Chisholm's flat was on the first floor, and he seldom used the lift. It was a cheerful little set of rooms, and the switching-on of the electric light showed a couple of comfortable armchairs, a big sofa, a table laden with books and papers, a smoker's lamp and an open box of choice cigars ready for selection, while on a small side board there stood the ever-useful soda-water apparatus, with glasses to hand and a decanter of whisky.

"Sit down, old man!" he said, rather huskily. "Have a smoke first and a whisky-soda after?—or the whisky-soda first and the smoke last?"

"Thanks, I won't drink anything"—Bruce answered—then he suddenly smiled—"Sylvia doesn't like it."

"Sylvia doesn't like—what?" asked Chisholm.

"Drinking. Oh, she's not a 'temperance howler'—but she simply *hates* whisky! She says we men drink far too much of it."

"So we do!" agreed Chisholm, brusquely—then he held out the box of cigars, smiling somewhat forcedly—"And I see that though you are not married yet, you're under petticoat government already! You mustn't do what Miss Brooke doesn't like! You may smoke, I suppose?"

Bruce laughed.

"Oh yes, I may smoke!" He chose a cigar, and lighting it, threw himself down full length on the inviting big sofa—"I say, Eustace, you're jolly comfortable here!"

"So are you, I think!" and Chisholm seated himself in an armchair opposite, looking at him fixedly—"Now—tell me! About—this wedding—you really wish me to be best man?"

"Rather!" Bruce rolled back his curly head against the sofa, and turned his blue eyes round on his friend with an affectionate eagerness—"You

see it's to come off at the end of next week—and there's not much time——"

"Not much time, indeed!" murmured Chisholm,—why, he thought, had Bruce's tie slipped in some way so that his throat was more open than ever? He could almost see its muscular throbbing—his hands clenched unconsciously——

"We thought"—went on Bruce—"or rather, the parents thought—that if we got married on Saturday morning we could motor straight away to some quiet little place where nobody knows us——"

He paused, with a sudden glow on his face and light in his eyes.

"Well!" said Chisholm, and his voice sounded odd even to himself—"And have you decided on the 'quiet little place'?"

Bruce smiled.

"I think so!" he answered—"It's a drowsy village by a river where I used to go fishing, and a man I know is lending us his bungalow—a regular little cottage in a wood, covered with roses and honeysuckle, and the garden runs down to the river—I can almost see Sylvia standing among the flowers—it'll suit her perfectly! But—Eustace! I don't know how I shall be able to bear it!"

"Bear what? The bungalow?"

"No, you dear old joker! The happiness!—the tremendous happiness of knowing she is my wife!"

Lying back on the sofa he closed his eyes in a rapture of imagined ecstasy—and all at once a great thrill of savage fury rushed through every vein in Chisholm's body, as though he had suddenly been filled from head to foot with a consuming fire. Wildly he stared at the indolently reclining form of his friend—the closed eyes—the uncovered throat—and then—then something seemed to sweep at him and cover him in a crimson wave of blood—he made a fierce spring forward with outstretched, cruelly clutching hands, grasping at—what? Blackness—blackness!—impenetrable impalpable blackness!—and yet—stop!—there was the moon, looking at him with a white hot glare. A thick atmosphere surrounded him heavy with strange odours—he felt himself walking with soft velvety tread towards That which he sought to kill—it was very dark, he said to himself, but he knew that Other was there! That Other who was about to snatch from him the dearest object of his passion, the goal of his ambition and desire! That Other must die! * * * * * How the moon glared!—and these thick mosses and leaves over which he moved stealthily—how they crackled in the dryness of the heat! . . . Ah! . . . at last! . . . He saw his rival!—one like himself, yet not offending more than that the same desire impelled them both, and with an ungovernable rage that shook him to the very core of life, he bounded towards

his prey, ready to kill!—to kill!—then paused,—amazed. For, what was Bruce doing here in this dark place?—the fair, handsome brave young fellow with the eyes he had always loved because of their frank and steadfast honesty? It was not Bruce whose blood he thirsted for with such an insatiate lust of cruelty?—no, no! His own friend?—it could not be!—the very thought was hideous and untenable! Possessed by a torture more desperate than any dream of hell, he struggled to cry out, but vainly—a burning hand seemed laid upon his mouth.

"Heaven have mercy on me!" he whispered, thickly—"Am I a man, or a beast of prey? Defend me from myself, O God!"

A great shudder shook him—he felt himself falling—falling—falling into a sea of whirling chaos—he struggled and fought wildly against the overwhelming deluge which threatened to blind and choke him out of existence . . . then . . . all suddenly he emerged from that thick and awful darkness to find himself supported in Bruce's strong arms, with Bruce's kind young eyes bent on him in watchful anxiety.

"That was a nasty swirl, old chap! Remains of the Boche gas, I expect! Better now?"

Chisholm looked up with such relief at his heart as might have been felt had tons of earth been lifted from it. He smiled faintly.

" What have you been doing to me, dear boy ? " he asked—" Dabbing me with cold water ? What's been the matter ? "

" Oh, nothing much ! " declared Bruce, in the usual soldier-like way of making light of every difficulty—" You just ' went off ' suddenly in your chair, and you called out ' Kill—kill ! ' but there aren't any Boches here to kill, so I couldn't obey orders ! " He laughed. " You know we *did* get a fair amount of that beastly gas, and I shouldn't wonder if it hangs about us for a long time. Feeling all right ? "

" Nearly ! " Chisholm straightened himself and passed his hand across his forehead, which was wet with the cool water his friend had lavishly bestowed on it—" It was a horrible sickly sensation !—curious too, for I got the idea that I wasn't here at all——"

" You weren't ! " agreed Bruce—" You were evidently ' somewhere in France ' ! "

" No—I was in a forest "—said Chisholm, musingly —" yes, that was it ! A forest so dark that I had to crawl through it over moss and leaves—yet the moon was shining—and I felt I was out to kill something——"

" True sporting tendency ! " commented Bruce, laughing—" Don't you talk too much ! Take it easy ! "

" Oh, I'm all right now "—and Chisholm rose from

his chair, stretched himself and stood erect—" A little unsteady on my feet—but that's nothing." Then seeing Bruce's face, he smiled. " Don't worry, dear fellow! I'll see you downstairs by way of exercise, and then get to bed."

" Hadn't I better stay with you ? " suggested Bruce, " I can sleep quite comfortably on that jolly sofa."

A tremor ran through Chisholm's nerves. If the young man stayed, might not the wicked insidious temptation come again—might he not wander in his sleep and see Bruce lying defenceless there with that pulsing throat uncovered—and then—dared he be sure of himself ?

" No, no, certainly not ! " he said, quickly and almost imperatively—" You get home, Bruce—I know your father is waiting up for you. I'm as well as possible—that stupid faintness was nothing to speak of—just a reminder of the trenches ! And we haven't talked about your wedding or arranged anything ; however, you'll let me know the when and where and how in good time, won't you ? And, Bruce "—here he laid both hands affectionately on his friend's shoulders, " Let me just say that I wish you joy with all my heart ! You deserve your luck ! —every bit of it ! Sylvia Brooke is a lovely girl, and as sweet and good as she's lovely, and—" here he paused, and then resumed, speaking with slower

and more impressive emphasis—" I want you to feel that there's nothing gives me greater peace of mind and pleasure than to know you have won all your heart's desire. Remember that! Whatever happens—whether I come out of the next devilish scuffle or not, remember that! And God bless you!"

Walter Bruce looked full in his friend's face.

"I'm not likely to forget!" he said—"You are a dear good chap, Eustace!—the kindest and most loyal friend I ever had. I'll tell Sylvia—but she knows it already."

"She knows—what?" queried Chisholm, almost timidly.

"Why, what a splendid fellow you are!—as true as steel!" declared Bruce, heartily—"She always says you couldn't even *think* a mean thing, still less do it——"

"Come along, let me see you out"—interrupted Chisholm hastily—"An enthusiastic lover will talk all night, and it's time you went. Take another cigar."

Bruce did so—and then they descended the stairs together. "My 'silly swirl' spoilt our chat," said Chisholm—"However, like the serial stories it is 'to be continued in our next.' Be sure to let me know when I'm to turn up as 'best man'—time, place, etcetera! A khaki wedding I suppose?"

"Rather!" And Bruce gave a proud little gesture of his handsome head—"There's no more becoming costume just now!"

They reached the hall door, shook hands warmly, and parted.

Chisholm stood for a moment watching his friend's swinging stride up the street till he was out of sight—then with a kindly "Good night," to the drowsy porter who was now free to lock up the place and go to bed, he re-ascended the stairs.

Entering his flat he shut and locked the door of the sitting-room and looked about him with a strange sense of something unfamiliar and oppressive. The atmosphere of that dreadful heated darkness into which he had suddenly swooned seemed to cling to the walls. He stood inert,—confused—bewildered; trying vainly to disentangle the knot into which his mentality had become mysteriously ravelled. Then all at once clear reason asserted itself, and with it came the full, sweeping conviction of what his thoughts had been—thoughts of bitter envy—thoughts of pitiless revenge—thoughts of positive murder—thoughts which whether in a nation or an individual are the active germs of things, and are the cause of all evil or all good. He trembled, growing sick and cold with self-scorn and self-hatred as the horrible truth was forced upon him of what might have happened had his thoughts been allowed to grow

into action—had he yielded to the insidious evil of an instinct within him—a subconscious, dreadful instinct for which he felt he was not responsible, but which threatened to overwhelm his very manhood, and make brutish havoc of all honour, all loyalty, all true courage—and, moved by a passionate impulse, he suddenly threw himself on his knees by the sofa where his friend had so lately lain in smiling unconsciousness of a threatening death!

"Thank God!" he whispered, hiding his face humbly against his clasped hands—"Thank God who gave me strength to kill the Beast in me!"

THE STEPPING STAR

"YOU are old-fashioned!" he said.

She smiled.

"Yes. I am."

He eyed her half admiringly, half quizzically. She was charming to look at; he admitted the fact, albeit grudgingly.

"You still believe in Christmas?"

Her smile deepened, giving wonderful softness to her eyes.

"Still!"

"And in New Year?"

"Surely! It is a fresh lease of a beautiful house."

"What do you mean by that?" he asked.

"I mean what I say"—she answered, gently—"Every new year is a privilege, granting us continued enjoyment of the world. And certainly the world is a beautiful house to live in."

"You find it so"—he said—"others may not."

She was silent.

The two were standing beside a sparkling little river which brawled and bounded and chattered

over heaped stones and great moss-covered boulders ; it was late October, but the air held the warmth of the past summer in its breath, and the afternoon sun, sinking between wing-shaped stretches of rosy mist, illumined with vivid brilliancy the red and golden foliage of many trees not yet denuded of their clothing by gale or frost. The pretty warble of a robin close by sounded distinctly above the purling flow of the bright, hurrying water, and on the other side of the stream a vista of fading green opened like an arch in a wall showing a far glimpse of hills rising one above the other in a dream-like haze of blue.

" You find it so "—he repeated—" and I cannot imagine why you do ! You call it a beautiful house to live in—*I* call it a crazily built house, with rotten foundations, damp walls, a leaky roof, and windows that let in more cold than comfort. Apparently you are blind to its deficiencies. What makes you think it is a beautiful house ? You have nothing to live for ! "

His tone was harsh and querulous ; she turned her eyes upon him with a faint wonder that was half pity.

" No ? Have I not ? " said she.

Something in her serene look increased his irritation. He was conscious of his own roughness, and yet he had a curious satisfaction in yielding to it.

"No—not that I can perceive"—he answered—"You are no longer a girl—you are not married—you have no lovers—and you have what I call unnatural tastes. So that your existence—in my opinion—is purposeless and absurd—for a woman."

She laughed—a sweet low laugh expressive of perfect happiness.

"Your opinion doesn't matter"—she said, quite gently—"Pardon me—I don't mean to be rude—but really—do you think it does?"

He flushed, and turned slightly away from her, prodding the ground with his walking stick.

"It ought to"—he went on, obstinately—"I'm speaking for your good. Here you are, living all alone in the country with a couple of servants, wasting yourself on ideals and airy propositions of modern science—you are what you consider 'emancipated'—or 'advanced,' when long ago you should have been a respectable wife and mother bringing up a family——"

She interrupted him, the laughter still lighting up her face.

"You've no idea how awful that sounds!" she exclaimed. "A respectable wife and mother bringing up a family! Simply overwhelming! There are so many of them!"

"So many of what?" he demanded.

"Respectable wives and mothers bringing up

large families "—she replied, demurely—" I don't blame them, I'm sure! They only follow the race habit."

"What do you imply by that profound utterance?" he asked, sarcastically—" The 'race habit,' as you call it, is the nature habit."

" Exactly!" she agreed—" The habit of wild nature—untrained nature—nature going up and down on the same old road—but not nature advancing to the highest possibilities and power."

He changed his attitude in order to confront her fully.

" You talk nonsense," he said—" Nature is the organ of universal production, and a woman like yourself who deliberately sets aside the real function of womanhood, which is to produce new generations of humanity, is an incongruity in the general scheme. And you say you believe in Christmas! Why, the very idea of Christmas is a Mother and Child——"

He paused, astonished at the sudden glow of positive beauty which transfigured her face.

" Yes!" she said, softly—" A Mother who would have been 'put away privily' and shamed but for the dream of an Angel! A Child born God-in-Man! That is why I believe in Christmas—because of a Dream!—and because I know the God-in-man can be realized even in *our* day!"

He smiled tolerantly.

"Is that what you are waiting for? I'm afraid you'll wait a long time! 'Race habits' are not easily overcome."

"Not easily—no—but much more easily than you imagine"—she answered—"In the beginnings of life on this planet, if we are to believe science, the 'race habit' evolved the creation of monster mammals and strange reptiles, traces of which we now find only in fossils and strata. *Their* 'race habit' was to propagate themselves till the type arrived at the process of transformation, when their former 'race habit' was overcome. The 'race habit' of human beings follows the same course. They are still more animal than spiritual—men copy perishing types, not having got sufficient individuality to evolve higher forms. Poets tell them of 'love,' and they sometimes listen and make a feeble effort to understand that divine element—but they fail and fall back on mere 'sex attraction.' Sex attraction results only in what a cynical modern author has styled 'the manners and customs of the poultry yard.' Those manners and customs do not appeal to me."

"They are manners and customs which are likely to last as long as this world is in being"—he said. "Sex attraction is the chief business of life."

"Of a certain phase of animal life—oh yes—I know that well enough!" she acquiesced, cheerfully

—"But it is rather absurd to continue in one phase when there are others waiting. Sex-attraction means nothing more to me than the buzzing of midges, if it is devoid of the real 'love' that is beyond all sex. The birth of children is an additional burden to the world and a sorrow to themselves unless they are born of that higher love. You know there is a further 'phase' where we 'neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven'!"

"I think you are mad!" he said, angrily.

Her eyes sparkled bewitchingly, and she laughed.

"Really! Perhaps I am! Anyway I must be so to you—you, who write articles to order on the policy of the present Governments in Europe! Such a waste of time! Nobody reads them!"

"Women like you never read anything"—he declared, impatiently, "except novels and shopping lists! As for politics, you never understand them. You fought for female suffrage, and now you've got the vote you don't know what to do with it——"

"Do *you* know what to do with it?" she asked lightly—"Don't you wait till you're told *how* to vote? Of course you do!—just as you write what you're told to write! You're a bound slave whichever way you turn! Don't you envy me my 'glorious liberty of the free'?"

She turned her bright face fully up to his, and

though he was reluctant to acknowledge her charm of movement and manner he was conscious of a thrill of desire to awaken in her what he considered 'natural' feeling in woman—namely, respect and admiration for man, the special man in this case being himself. The knowledge that such an effort was hopeless vexed him to an almost absurd degree.

"No"—he replied—"I don't envy you at all. I always pity an old maid."

The smile in her eyes grew more radiant.

"Your pity is quite wasted!"—she said. "There is no such creature as an old maid, except through the 'race habit' and race traditions. Oldness itself is a race habit; youth is the law of nature. Nothing can ever make *me* old, unless I choose to make *myself* so!"

He gave a gesture with his hand as though throwing something away in scorn.

"As I said before, you are mad!" he exclaimed,—"You are mentally obsessed by a foolish idea!"

"Well, let it be so!" she laughed—"We are all mentally obsessed by something or other. A number of my women friends have been mentally obsessed by the 'foolish idea' of marrying. They *have* married—and many of them wish they hadn't. Some of them are physical wrecks—some have children who are the misery and despair of their lives—and all have lost the illusion of 'love' which

first captivated their fancy. *My* 'mental obsession,' whatever it may be, keeps me in good health at any rate, and gives me happiness and freedom—so there is something to be said for it. But why should we argue? You came down for a breath of country air—do take it thankfully, and praise God for a fine day!"

Her voice had a sweet, inspiriting tone, and as he met her straight, kind look he smiled, albeit reluctantly.

"I cannot deny that you look wonderfully well and happy"—he said—"But——"

She held up a finger warningly.

"There are no 'buts'"—she interrupted him—"To be well and happy is enough." She came nearer and laid a hand lightly on his arm. "You are tired—you know you are! Your daily journalism gives you no rest. You tell people the things your editor wishes you to tell them, and people never listen. Your platitudes recoil on yourself with a kind of nausea. The world is always with you as it never is with me."

"Yet you call it a beautiful house," he said.

"So it is—but I am not a snail or a tortoise to carry my house on my back!" she answered, merrily—"In one sense, as a temporary dwelling, the world *is* a house—but in another and truer form it is just a stepping-star."

" What do you mean by that ? " he asked—" Another of your flighty, fantastic notions ? "

" Perhaps ! " she replied—" But see !—here we stand on one side of this lovely little river—we can watch it running down from the heights above us, now in sunshine, now in shadow, sparkling, chattering, and jumping like a conscious creature over the stones and rocks in its path—to me it is like life itself—and look at those boulders worn smooth by its passage !—they make a natural bridge across it—to the other side ! "

She pointed with her fine, daintily shaped hand to the opposite bank, the arch in the trees and the soft blue glimpse of the hills beyond. He looked at her, and something in her aspect struck him as strange and almost unreal.

" Well ! " he said, and a slight tremor ran through his blood as though he were suddenly chilled.

" Well ! " she echoed, and smiled—" We can pass over the water easily on those stepping-stones and find a fresh view of the landscape. In the same way we can pass over the world as a stepping-star, to a fresh phase of life. There are such a number of phases—we should not be stupidly content with one, for that is to be no more ambitious than the insects or the cattle."

" It's the only one we know of "—he said—" When we die we may perhaps discover something new— "

"But why wait to die in order to discover?" she queried—"*Now* is the time to find out all we can in this present life. You do not understand! I know—for I have proved it—that there are many phases of existence *here and now*; it is only human obstinacy that hinders experience. You talk of marriage as if the only destiny of women must be to mate with men—and the only destiny of man to propagate his own kind without any change or improvement—all that is merest animalism! Some of us dream of something better; some of us grow tired of standing on only one side of the stream of life—some of us take courage to cross over on the Stepping-Star to a finer point of view, just as I cross over this water—quite simply and easily."

She lifted her white skirt daintily in one hand—then paused——

"It is all a matter of progress and transformation"—she said—"Surely you know that? There is no stop in our 'going on and never to die' destiny. First, the germ—then the tiny spark of life—then the insect, the reptile, the bird, the animal, the man—all, all evolving to the Angel! It is only our obstinate and unbelieving selves that put a drag on the wheel!"

And, with her dress held above the brawling little river she stepped on each stone dividing the one

bank from the other. The water swirled and played round her without wetting her feet, and the autumn sunshine poured a stream of deep gold straight down on her light, well-poised figure and soft brown hair. He watched her with assumed indifference, secretly admiring nevertheless the exceeding grace of her movements, and in his own mind doubting whether he could follow her without an awkward slip or ludicrous tumble.

She reached the opposite bank, and ascending it, stood within the archway formed by the overhanging trees—then turned towards him.

" Are you coming ? " she called.

But he was stricken dumb with sudden amazement and fear. Was he dreaming ?—or did he see *another* figure behind her own ?—a figure apparently projected from herself, identical in outline, but of an exceeding beauty, luminous as a rainbow and as delicately ethereal.

" Are you coming ? " again called the sweet voice, and he saw her hand beckoning to him—" It's quite safe ! "

He tried to master his nervous terror.

" Wait !—Wait one moment ! " he stammered ; and then—the sparkling water seemed to rush over him in a silver whirl, and he fell senseless.

When he recovered, she was kneeling beside him, supporting his head and bathing his forehead with

her handkerchief dipped in the cold stream. As he opened his eyes she smiled.

"That's better!" she said, cheerily—"I'm so sorry I asked you to come over to the other side! Some people can't even *think* of crossing running water on stepping-stones without feeling giddy. I'm really *very* sorry! As soon as I saw you fall I came back at once—there!—now are you all right?"

Ashamed of his weakness, he murmured an affirmative and managed to raise himself and stand up. But he was uneasily conscious that the strange outline of light he had seen about her form still clung to her, making a shimmer of pale splendour in the hazy autumn atmosphere. With an effort at self-control, he said:—

"I was not giddy—and I was quite ready to cross over to the other side. But—you played me a strange trick!—you are playing it now!"

She had risen from her knees and stood confronting him. Her eyes expressed a great wonder.

"A strange trick?" she echoed—"I? Why, what have I done?"

"What have you done? I may ask what are you doing?—at this very instant? What is all this mysterious light I see accompanying you as you move? Science can do many remarkable things nowadays—and projection of light can be manifested in various forms—but that it should take your

shape and be, as it were, part of yourself is a kind of conjuring that seems inexplicable!"

She looked at him fully and frankly.

"If it is as you say," she answered, simply—"I am quite unconscious of it."

"Unconscious!" He gave an incredulous gesture—"Come, come! Do you mean to tell me that you do not know of, and cannot see your other Self (or so it seems)—behind you?"

Her surprise was entirely unaffected.

"No, truly!" she said—"Of course I am aware that I have another Self—*in the making*, and that I am doing all I can to help it in its effort—but I have never seen that actual *ME*! What am I like?"

A nervous shiver overcame him—he grew very pale.

"I cannot tell you"—he murmured—"The thing is altogether beyond me——" He broke off and looked uneasily around him. There was nothing of an alarming nature in the beautiful landscape, bathed in the deepening glory of the sun—the little river chattered over its pebbly bed like a child having too much at once to talk about—and presently, as his gaze came slowly back to the fair woman beside him, he gave a long breath of relief as he saw that the mysterious "nimbus" he had seen around her was no longer visible. The tension of his nerves relaxed—his self-possession returned, and he smiled.

"It must have been something wrong with my eyes"—he said, affecting an easy indifference—"The sunshine, the water and your white gown dazzled them curiously. I have often been warned of possible mischief likely to happen to them. I work too early and too late."

"Yes?" she queried, tentatively—"And why?"

"Why? Because I must work to live."

"True—but must you work at the expense of sight?"

"Perhaps not—but I like work."

"So do I"—she said. "But I work to strengthen my vision—not to lose it!" She paused—then—"I wish you could have told me what I was like! That Other Self of mine!"

"It was a delusion—a mirage!" he answered, impatiently. "The result of your fantastic talk, no doubt!"

"No doubt!" she echoed, dreamily—"Rays of light take strange ways of action sometimes—and science is only just beginning to find out some of those ways. You remember the words!—'Lo, the Star which they saw in the east went before them till it came and stood over where the young child was.' That was a wonderful 'projection of light,' as you call it, used for the first Christmas! To my mind such light should stand over every 'young child' as a mark of the God-in-man—that is to

say, every child born of pure spirituality in love—not animalism. You asked if I believed in Christmas, and I do,—simply because it is the symbol of the future when we have evolved from our present phase to the next development—not *after* death but here in *this* life."

"I have told you that I cannot follow you"—he said, impatiently—"You are what men most dislike, a clever woman—more than that and worse, a feminine scientist—and you seem incapable of seeing that you are making havoc of your life——"

"How?" she asked, quickly. "Where do you see any signs of havoc? I am happier and healthier than any woman I have ever met, or, for that matter, any man. You came down here on a day's visit 'for a breath of fresh air' so you wrote—but really you came to try and persuade me to marry your brother. Yes—you know you did! He, as a scientist himself, is pleased to consider that I might possibly be useful to him, not only as a wife but an assistant investigator—his proposal of marriage amounted to that." He made a deprecatory movement of his hand. "Oh, do not deny it!" she went on, laughingly—"I refused. Can you imagine my accepting him? And having once said 'No,' can you suppose I would ever say 'Yes'?"

Her eyes flashed a merriment and disdain intermingled.

"*Souvent femme varier*!" he murmured—"You may be no exception to the rule!"

"Christmas is coming!" she said, still smiling—"And New Year. And the beautiful house in which we all live will see me a long way apart from the way in which you walk! I hope your brother will marry a nice woman who will be a respectable wife and mother and bring up a large family! I don't think he will make much progress in his scientific researches that way—but what does it matter?—scientific research is not a race-habit—bringing up a large family *is*!"

"You are the most aggravating woman I have ever met!" he said, irritably.

She laughed.

"I'm sure I am! Please don't mind it! Let us go back to the house—it's nearing the time for your train. We've had a pleasant little ramble, and an unsatisfactory little talk—and you have had the singular privilege of seeing *ME*!—that is, the 'Me' in as far as I have been able to move ahead a little out of the 'race habit'! I hope I was worth seeing?"

He grew pale, and as he walked beside her switched his cane unmercifully among the meadow flowers, striking their slender stems to the ground.

"I tell you my eyes deceived me"—he said—"I saw, or thought I saw, a Winged Form behind you,

exactly of your height and outline—it was an exquisite mirage!"

Her smiling eyes met his.

"I'm glad it was exquisite!" she said—"I think I may go so far as to assure you that it could have been no 'mirage.' It must have been truly 'Me' as I hope to become in time. I am still in the chrysalis—but I am making my way out of it!"

He frowned.

"What you say is mere folly!" he said—"You are mentally unhinged; and though you may be very clever with your 'Light' problems and experiments, they are proving too much for you. That is my honest opinion, and I am sorry for you!"

"Kind man!" she murmured, still smiling.

He flushed angrily.

"Oh, you are satirical!" he said—"All clever women are!—they like to put men to ridicule——"

"When they make themselves ridiculous!" she interposed—"The inherent sense of humour cannot always be repressed!"

"You think me ridiculous, I suppose!"

Half laughingly she deprecated the suggestion.

"Oh no!—not more so than any one of the eminent men who denounced Galileo because he said the earth moved round the sun. It does so move —but to their minds (constituted like yours!)

he was 'mentally obsessed by a foolish idea'!"

"Your example is badly chosen"—he said—"Galileo was a learned man——"

"His learning did not save him from imprisonment in his old age"—she replied—"and if I were ever so 'learned' you would not spare me your contemptuous criticism and condemnation because—I am a woman!" She lifted her fair head with a fine movement of self-reliance that had no touch of pride. "Just consider the position logically—you are fond of logic!—here am I, a 'lone lorn woman' like Dickens's dear 'Mrs. Gummidge,' only not at all conscious of my lone lornness!—with a small fortune, left to me by an unhappy old uncle who made himself miserable because he could not eat enough of his money—and instead of passing my time in the ordinary feminine way of 'catching' men, I set my mind on study. Then, your brother, a much-praised Professor with at least a quarter of the alphabet tacked on to his name, proposes to marry me. And why? Because, being interested in some of my observations, he thinks I might 'by chance' make one or two important discoveries. If I did so, when married to him, I should be like Madame Curie, and he, like *her* husband, would be given half the glory or more, by men, simply because he *is* a man! Rather than engage in this sort of thing, I choose to live and work alone—without any extraneous ad-

vice or assistance—what 'mental obsession' is there in this?"

"Pure selfishness, I call it!" he said, curtly.

She laughed gaily.

"And your brother's proposal of marriage has nothing of 'self' in it, you think?" she queried. Well!—But if you imagine, as you seem to imply, that I despise wifehood and motherhood, you are wrong—I do not. Only I would have both wifehood and motherhood on a higher plane—nobler and more sacred than they are at the present day. Just now there are two thousand divorce cases awaiting settlement! What good or hope for humanity is there in this? Two thousand!—and yet you would have me join the great company of martyrs! Please do not strike down any more flowers with that stick of yours!—it is quite a 'manly' habit!—but the pretty little creatures have done you no harm!"

"You irritate me!"—he said—"I feel as if I must hit something!"

"Yes, I'm quite sure you do!" and she bent her soft deep eyes upon him with an expression that was almost pity—"But please try to understand me! I told you I believed in Christmas—I believe in it ardently as the greatest Symbol ever given to mankind! It teaches that we must have gods born into this wonderful 'house' of the world—not so-called 'men' who are often lower in their thoughts

and actions than the poor four-footed brutes they enslave and kill. The over-production of such men is the great mistake of humanity—it is responsible for every sort of misery and disease. Wars and strikes and plagues are its results in all ages and nations—and these evils will continue unceasingly *until we women take up the business of transforming the race.* We should have begun two thousand years ago dating from the first Christmas!"

He looked at her in blank amazement.

"Do you think *you* have begun this astounding work?" he asked mockingly.

"Only in so far as I have begun to transform myself," she answered—"And in doing so, I have been helped by friends unguessed of—across the Stepping-star. Such a little way across!—you have no idea what a little way it is, nor how easy it is to talk to those on the other side! I hope soon to explain it—when all my facts are ready, and the scientists have come up with me. They are coming —and very quickly too. One of the best known among them has already written plain words on race-transformation from race habits, for he points out that 'since life began on earth there has been a gradual development into new and nobler forms'—and that 'if we merely pass on what we receive, the human race cannot develop onward and upward until man is "a little lower than the angels"!'

So—if you ever give me a thought after to-day—try not to condemn me for breaking 'race habits' which make our 'house' of this world miserable, and helping to develop new and nobler forms which shall make us happy!"

She held out her hand in farewell. They had come to within a few steps of a charmingly built cottage set in a garden which was at this season gay with autumn blossom of asters, golden-rod and Michaelmas daisies, expressive of delicious peace and pleasure.

"I suppose—as you are becoming a 'celebrity'—I may not give the gist of our conversation as a press interview?" he said with almost the 'professional' smile, amounting to a sneer.

"You would not be able to give it correctly"—she answered, quietly—"therefore it is wiser to say nothing. Much of the mischief of the world is made through Press inaccuracies."

There was a pause.

"Well—good-bye!" he said—"I'm sorry you are such a crank—for you are a very charming woman!"

She coloured, not altogether with pleasure.

"After all," he continued, half banteringly—"I came to see if you really believed in Christmas. Few people really do nowadays. They pretend to——"

"I do not pretend"—she interposed, gravely—"To me it is the symbol of the future. I see the Star in the East!"

"The transformation of the race?" he suggested, smiling.

"The uplifting of Man through the purity of Woman"—she said—"That is the meaning of Christianity and the ultimate goal of all science."

Her face grew bright with inspired feeling—she looked lovely as any pictured angel, and curiously afraid lest that strange light which had terrorized him before should shine round her again, he bent over her hand and kissed it with conventional courtesy.

"That is your faith?" he said.

"That is my faith!" she answered—"May it soon be yours!"

And so they parted.

WHY SHE WAS GLAD

HER garden was gay with spring-time flowers and foliage—there were happy birds swinging on the boughs and singing their amorous carols to the sun—and she herself, a woman easily contented with simple things, was tranquilly pleased with all she saw and all she felt. Her one child, a little dimpled girl-fairy of two years old, toddled with a charming unsteadiness on the velvety green grass, every now and then stooping to pluck a daisy with a small chuckle of delight; and as she sat in a low wicker chair on the lawn busily stitching at a dainty white frock for this darling companion of her hours, she thought how good it was to be thus "alone with baby," as she said to herself—"alone with baby, and without —Him!"

"Him" was her husband—he was away fighting, n company with "all good men and true." And she was very glad it was so—very glad! In her heart she knew her gladness was a horrible sort of gladness —it was not patriotism, for if the truth must be told

he did not care a button what became of any country, provided she could only have her little home —her little baby. This was the blank, stark truth; the truth as it is known to many folks who have not the courage to admit it. She was not sufficiently a hypocrite to join in the loud cry of "For King and Country"; she had no particular love for either— as she was wont to say, they did not care for *her*— why should she care for them? She, and not her husband, had earned the money which bought the pretty country cottage in which she dwelt serene— she, and not her husband, had paid for its furnishing and upkeep, and considering how hard she had worked, she thought the taxes inordinately burdensome and had not the slightest admiration or devotion for the Government which imposed them.

"The people make the wealth of the country by their hard work"—she would say—"and Governments take half of it away for unnecessary expenditure. That's how I see it."

And now Government had taken her husband. And the most curious and disconcerting part of the affair was that she did not mind his being taken! She ought to have minded—but the plain fact remained, that she did *not*! She thought she ought to have been sorry—and she tried to picture the horrors of battle, the trenches, the bursting bombs— all to no purpose. Through and above all shone the

glory of his going—not the glory of patriotism, heroism or any other "ism"—but simply that he had "gone." Yes—he had gone, and his absence had lasted several months, during which she had been so happy that she could hardly believe in her own good fortune. Everything went "on wheels," the daily routine of life, the simple housekeeping, the baby's growth and enchanting little ways—there was nothing to wish for, nothing to grieve about. When any friend called and asked her about her husband, she would look up in a pretty smiling way and reply—"Oh yes!—he's all right!—or he *was* when he wrote last. He's in the trenches."

Then, if the friend volunteered a sympathetic remark, such as—

"You must be very anxious!" she would answer—"Oh, I don't feel anxious somehow! It seems to me that he's sure to come back! There are some sort of men that *never* get killed!—they go through all sorts of dangers and are none the worse. Robert is like that."

And a faint thrill would run through her veins as she spoke thus, because the thought that jumped into her brain and persistently stayed there was that "if" Robert was *not* "like that,"—if, on the contrary, he *did* get killed, she would not perhaps be as overcome with grief as might be expected!

Stitching away in the warm sunshine, she looked

fair and pretty, with an air of delicate refinement and intelligence in her features which expressed both brain and heart. The smile that came on her lips as she watched her baby girl toddling to and fro, was lovely and Madonna-like, and no one would have thought that she had ever suffered from bitter disillusion and disappointment in her dearest hopes and dreams. Yet such was the case. She had married in the early hey-day of her youth, and her love for the man she chose to be her life's partner had been one of those rare passions of devotion and unquestioning blind tenderness which saw no fault, no weakness, no lack of principle or steadfastness in the idol set up for adoration. Yet three years—indeed barely one year—had sufficed to scatter the rose-coloured mist before her eyes and to rend the fine veil of pathetic self-deception. He who, as lover, had wooed and won her with a thousand endearments, showed himself in his true colours as husband—a selfish sensualist, ever seeking his own comfort, his own gain, his own convenience. Had she been able to fathom his nature at first she would have soon discovered that it was for his own gain and his own convenience that he had married her at all. He had, as he himself explained to his boon "bar" companions, "got into a bit of a hole"—and he used a woman's life to pull him out. Learning by chance that this particular woman was making

good money by stencilling and other decorative work for big London and Paris firms, he set out to secure her as a wife who would be useful to him. She was very easily secured—all women are, while under the brief hallucination that they are really "loved." After her marriage she went on working, while he loafed and idled, taking various positions and resigning them as the whim seized him, and spending what he earned recklessly without thought of the wife or the child born to him, and moreover giving way to all the defects of his nature without restraint. His entrance into the tasteful little cottage which his wife had made into a home such as any man might be happy in, was the signal of noise and discord—his loud, grumbling voice, for ever on the key of fault-finding, scared the baby and started it to scream and howl—the mere sight of him sent the one maid-of-all-work, a contented little body when alone with her mistress, scampering down the kitchen stairs and into the back cellar where she could pretend not to hear him if he called —and wherever he went, into whatever room he entered, there was an immediate sense of unhappiness and confusion. Nothing was ever rightly done, in his opinion—if the window was shut he would roar:—

"Open the window for Heaven's sake! The place is suffocating!—a man must have air!"

If it was open—" Shut that window! I suppose you want me to catch my death of cold!"

If there were flowers on the table, he would throw them out of doors with a gesture of aversion, and the remark:—

" Sickly smelling things! They spoil the food! I can't imagine why you put them near me while I'm having my dinner!"

At meals he would read the paper steadily, hardly addressing his wife save in monosyllables. His baby girl bored him excessively—he longed to smack her little inquisitive face many times, but knew he dared not, with the mother looking on. In the evenings he generally went out " for a game of billiards" as he said, but in truth merely to " pick up" some stray girl with whom he could drink and fool the time away, knowing that when he got home his wife, too contemptuous of his conduct to either comment upon it or reproach him, would be in bed with the baby at her side—that innocent little shield saving her for a time from his company.

Then the Great War broke out—and though he sought " exemption" he naturally failed to obtain it, and was drafted off. Some faint touch of regret and compunction smote his callous soul on the morning he left his home—a sort of scale dropped from his eyes as he looked at his wife, neat and charming in a soft blue print dress, with a blue ribbon in her

fair hair, holding "baby" by the wee dimpled hand, attired in the same blue, the little garment being made out of the remainder of the mother's gown. He was a tall, heavy man, personable enough as men go—and a curious sort of irritation beset him as he realized that she —his wife, looked very peaceful and pretty.

"Well!—good-bye!" he said, curtly—"You don't seem very sorry I'm going."

She smiled rather mischievously.

"Don't I?—Oh well, I'm a good patriot, you know! 'Your King and Country want you!'—it wouldn't do for your wife to want you too! That would be 'shirking,' and all the people who stay at home because they're too old, or too diseased, or too something or other, would be pointing at you and making faces! So I mustn't be sorry—I ought to be waving a flag and dancing, or beating a drum—anything noisy to show I'm patriotic!"

He looked at her dubiously.

"Of course you know I may be killed?" he said.

Her eyes twinkled.

"Of course! That's in the bargain! Then if you are, you will have died 'for King and country,' and perhaps your name will be mentioned in the local 'rag' of a newspaper. What an honour *that* will be!"

"*You* don't care for King and Country!" he said, with a frown.

"No—nor do you!" she answered—"you wouldn't go if you could help it—everybody knows that! I don't *pretend* to care—King and Country don't trouble about *me*, and I don't see why I should trouble about *them*. I only care—for Baby!"

"Well, Baby was born in this country"—he said, sonewhat lamely.

She laughed. "It wouldn't matter if Baby had been born in a boat on the sea, I should have loved her just the same"—she said—"Country doesn't count where Baby is concerned—she would have been just as precious to me if she had been born on a nameless desert island."

"You talk like a fool!" he said.

"Exactly! I know I do!"

There was a pause. A distant clock struck the hour. He fidgeted a little, shuffling his feet to and fro on the gravel path—then he said:—

"I suppose I must be off. I'd like to kiss Baby before I go."

She looked at him in surprise. He had never desired this privilege before. Then, without a word, she lifted the sweet little bundle of warm flesh, soft hair and dove-like cooings in her arms, and held it towards him. The child shrank nervously, and

pushing him away with her tiny, plump fists, began to whimper.

"Won't have me at any price!" he said, with a harsh laugh—"All right! Do as you like!" This as the mother put the little creature down again on the grass, where it began to crow and laugh as swiftly as it had begun to cry. "*I* shan't worry about you!"

He straightened himself, drawing his figure up to its full height—as a matter of fact he rather approved his own appearance in khaki—and fixed his cap more firmly on his head. A smile of conscious vanity and superiority lightened for a moment his rather heavy features—and he stooped towards his wife, brushing her cheek lightly with his lips—

"Good-bye, old girl!"

"Good-bye!" she answered, quietly.

For a moment he appeared to hesitate—something of shame for his long neglect of every tenderness in her regard pricked him like a needle point—but the emotion was brief, and passed before it had time to be deeply felt. Opening the garden-gate, he swung it to behind him with a clang,—and then marched down the road and so out of sight, without once looking back. He was gone.

His wife watched him disappear—then turned to the prettier picture—"Baby." Baby was sitting on the grass, looking like a little blue flower-fairy,

chuckling to herself in evident satisfaction with everything about her. Seeing her mother looking at her, she struggled up to her feet and began to toddle to the fond arms which were at once stretched out to receive her.

"Mum-mum!——" said she.

Nor was she at all frightened when "Mum-mum" caught her up in a close embrace, kissing her little soft face and hands in a passion of love.

"Darling!—Oh, darling Baby!" she murmured —"You and I are alone now!—*so* happy! Thank God!—so happy——"

Since then nearly ten months had gone by, and from "Him" she had very little news. His letters were brief and free of all sentiment. Sometimes he remembered the child, sometimes he did not.

He did not trouble to inquire how things were going on at home—he merely wrote of himself. She, meanwhile, pursued the somewhat quixotic course of never touching a farthing of the Government allowance to her as a soldier's wife or to "Baby" as a soldier's child; she put it all by, in case "he" should want money to spend when he returned. Her cleverness and quickness in her particular line of art and business earned sufficient for herself and the child to live on, and to pay the rent of the pretty cottage and garden, and the moderate wages of her one cheerful little "general" servant, so that the

well-ordered domestic quietude of her days left her nothing to wish for.

Autumn and winter had passed tranquilly, and now spring had come again, full of warmth and brightness; yet a chill had fallen on her mind like the touch of frost on a rose, for a letter from her husband informed her that he was about to get a fortnight's leave. She thought of this, painfully. She felt she knew what that "leave" was likely to mean. A good deal of idling about the neighbourhood with any companions he could pick up, and a considerable amount of drink. Affection for herself, delight in her society, she knew were impossible to him. He was one of those men who despise the good things they possess, and crave for whatever they cannot obtain. Her mind grew clouded over with the prospect of his arrival—she dreaded the sound of his rough, irritable voice, his indifferent, harsh manner, the covert sneer ever lurking in his cold eyes—and anon she wondered at herself as she remembered the time when, as a confiding, hopeful girl, she had believed in his tenderness and had lifted him to the height of an ideal worship as foolish as it was youthful and pathetic. These thoughts and memories crowded into her brain on that sunny afternoon when she sat in her chair on the lawn, stitching at the tiny tucks of her child's white frock—and she wondered wistfully why she

had ever imagined that any good or chivalrous feeling could dwell in a man so selfish and callous.

"We are so easily deceived"—she mused—"or rather, we so easily deceive ourselves! We are so ready to love something or some one; we are made in that pitiful way! And yet we did not make ourselves—we did not ask to be born into this world so ill prepared for all its disillusions. Even Baby—one day it will be her turn to suffer—oh, if I could only save her from it!—if I could only keep her as she is now in all her sweetness and innocence! But there's a long time yet!—thank God!—a long time before she ceases to be a happy child!"

And again her reflections turned to the prospect of her husband's "leave" with a sense of foreboding and discomfort. So many things would have to be done. Baby would have to be kept out of the way a good deal—her almost wordless chatter irritated her father. Then the cooking would be a source of argument— "he" was particular; she was not. She liked simple and clean food well cooked—but "he" liked hot and savoury delicacies, though perhaps now, after ten months in the army, he might not be so difficult to satisfy. Anyhow, there would be trouble of some sort—petty trouble which merely aggravated the temper without leading to anything. Her thoughts moved her to sighing—she stopped her busy needle and looked up at the exquisite blue

of the heavens—a laburnum tree just coming into bloom flashed its yellow against the soft azure, and a thrush, perching on one of its swaying boughs, sang a delicious madrigal of pure joy. Daisies were thick as snowflakes on the lawn, and "Baby," sitting among them, looked only like a larger daisy herself. Then suddenly the garden-gate clicked open sharply—a post-office messenger entered with a telegram in her hand, looking curiously, as she came, at both mother and child. A glance sufficed to read its contents—she who a moment ago had been a wife was now a widow. Her eyes ran over the brief message—she could hardly distinguish the words. They seemed to detach themselves and stand out—each one apart—"Deeply regret—inform you—killed."

Killed! Who was killed? She looked up from the paper—she saw the telegraph girl standing there——

"No answer"—she stammered—then vaguely repeated—"No answer—there is nothing to say!"

"Bad news, I'm afraid!" said the girl, kindly—"I'm sorry!"

"Thank you!" she murmured—"Thank you! . . . Yes . . . it is sudden . . . my husband is killed. . . . I cannot quite realize it . . . not yet. . . . But of course there are so many——"

She broke off, with a strange look; and the

telegraph messenger withdrew, thinking it wisest to leave her alone.

She stood, so left, with the telegram in her hand. She was so motionless, so absorbed, that "Baby" suddenly conceived it to be necessary that she should make her existence known, and came toddling up with daisies in her wee chubby hands, her hat fallen off, and her mop of fair curls shining like spun gold in the warm sunshine. She pulled at her mother's gown.

"Mummy!"

The mother stooped and caught her up. A great joy, an immense relief filled her eyes, as she pressed her lips tenderly on the soft little cheek drawn close to her own.

"I am glad!" she said, half aloud—"O God, forgive me! *You* know *why* I am glad! I can think of him now without fear or hatred!—I can try to remember him as he was when I first knew him—when I thought he loved me!—I can forget the evil and treasure the good!—I can forgive—yes! I must do my best to forgive, and I will! I will do my best! But I am glad!—it seems wicked—horrible to feel like this—but I cannot help it! I am thankful!—I will not be a hypocrite—I tell the truth to God and to myself—I am glad!—and God will pardon me, for He knows *why* I am glad!"

And that night when the sun had sunk, and peace

with utter silence reigned over the quiet little home and fragrant garden, she, watching her child asleep, thought somewhat in this fashion—

"Had he lived—why—then—in the years to come, we should have hated each other. Home would have been no home to either of us, and the child would have seen our discordant lives, and her own life would have become embittered and unhappy. He would have grown harsher and more intolerant—I, more utterly contemptuous. As it is now—who knows?—we may still love each other as in the old first days—he, in a world of which we only dream—I, doing my best for the child he gave me. And perhaps he will understand—and perhaps I too will forget his many cruelties, and see him only as I once saw him—the lover for whom I was ready to give my life! Now *he* has given his life 'for King and Country'!—may *they* be grateful!—though they cannot be so grateful as *I* would have been for a loving word! King and Country!—wife and child! Which *should* be the dearest to a man? I think I know! —but 'King and Country' wanted him, and they have taken him! I am glad!"

And when she said her prayers, she emphasized the words—

"Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them that *have* trespassed against us!"

THE SCULPTOR'S ANGEL

THE STORY OF A LOVE-MIRACLE

"YOU are a great artist, my son"—said the Abbot, with a favouring smile—"and, what is far better, you are noble and pure-hearted. And to you we entrust the high task of filling the vacant niche in our church with an Angel of Peace and Blessing. We will give you all possible freedom and leisure for the work, so that you may complete it before Christmas. On the Feast of the Nativity of our Blessed Lord we shall hope, God willing, to see your Angel in the chancel."

He, the renowned and wellnigh saintly head of one of the most famous among England's early monasteries, spoke with an authoritative dignity which gave his words, though gently uttered, the weight of a command, and the monk Anselmus whom he addressed heard him in submissive silence. They were standing together in one of the side chapels of a magnificent Abbey Church—the creation of devout and prayerful men who gave their highest

thought and most fervent toil to the service and praise of their Maker, and the days were those when implicit belief in a Divine Power, strong to guard and to defend the right, was the chief saving grace of the nation. The blind and unruly passions of that age were held in salutary check by the spiritual force and sanctity of the Church—and neither priest nor layman then foresaw the coming time of terror when desecrating hands should violate and pillage the holy shrines so patiently upbuilt to the honour and glory of God, leaving of them nothing but the ruins of their grandeur—the melancholy emblems of a faith more ruined even than they.

"You will"—continued the Abbot—"have your time to yourself—that is, of course, such time as is not occupied by the holy services, and we will take good care that nothing shall disturb the flow of what must be a truly divine inspiration. Yes, my son!—all labour is divine—and our best thoughts come from God alone, so that we of ourselves dare claim no merit. In the making of an Angel's likeness angels must surely guide the sculptor's hand—and bring his work to ultimate perfection! Is this not so? You hear me?—you understand?"

Anselmus had remained mute, but now he raised his bent head. He was not a young man—youth seemed to have passed him by in haste and left

him old before his time. His face was worn and thin, and showed deep furrows of pain and sorrow—only his eyes, sunken, yet bright and almost feverish in their lustre, flashed with the smouldering fires of suppressed and dying energy.

"I hear—and I understand"—he answered, slowly—"But why not choose a better man—a better sculptor? I am not worthy."

The Abbot laid a kindly hand upon his arm.

"Who among us is more worthy!" he said—"Have you not bestowed upon us the treasures of your genius, and do we not owe much of the greatest beauty of our Abbey Church to your designs? Good son, humility is becoming in you as in us all—each one of us is indeed unworthy so far as he himself is concerned—but your gift of art is from God, and therefore of its worthiness neither you nor I must presume to doubt! It is a gift that you are bound to use for highest purpose—need I say more? You accept the task?"

"Father, when you command I must obey"—replied the monk—"Nevertheless, I say I am not worthy of so much as the passing dream of an Angel!—but to satisfy you and our brethren I will do my best."

"That best will be sufficient for us"—said the Abbot—"And while you work, you must relax a little in the rigorous discipline to which you so

constantly submit yourself by your own choice. You fast too long and sleep too lightly—take more food and rest, Anselmus!—or the spirit will chafe the flesh with so much sharpness that the end will be disaster to both brain and body. Ease and freedom are as air and light to the artist—we give you both, my son, as far as may be given without trespass against our rules—work at your own time and pleasure—and we will make it a sacred charge to ourselves and our brethren not to break in upon the solitude of your studio—we will leave you alone with your Angel!"

He nodded, smiling graciously—and, making the sign of the cross in the air, paced slowly out of the chapel into the nave, and out of the nave again into the cloisters beyond, where among the many arches his tall and stately figure in its flowing robes disappeared.

The monk Anselmus stood for a few moments gazing after him—then with a deep sigh that was almost a groan, turned back into the deeper and more shadowed seclusion of the chapel, where with a movement of utter abandonment and despair he threw himself on his knees before the great Crucifix which had lately been sent as a gift to the monastery from the Holy Father in Rome.

"O God, God!" he prayed, under his breath—"Have mercy upon me, Thy wicked and treacherous

servant! Lift from my soul the heavy burden of its secret sin! Teach me the way to win Thy pardon and recover the peace that I have lost! Lighten my darkness, for the shadow of my crime is ever black before my eyes! Spare me, O Redeemer of souls!—for my remorse is greater than I can bear!"

He covered his face with his hands, and crouched rather than knelt before the sculptured figure of the crucified Christ, shuddering with the suppressed agony which seemed to rack his body with positive physical pain. His own thoughts whipped him as with a million lashes—they drove him through every memory of the past, sparing no detail, as they had driven him remorselessly over and over again till at times he had felt himself almost on the verge of madness. He looked back to his early days of boyhood and manhood in Rome, when as a young and ardent student of art, working under one of the master sculptors of that period, he had hewn life out of senseless marble with a power and perfection which had astonished his fellows in the school—he remembered how just when the wreath of fame seemed his to win and to hold, he had suddenly become possessed and inspired by an enthusiastic faith and exaltation towards the highest things—a faith and exaltation which had moved him to consecrate his life and genius to the Church—

and how, convinced of his vocation, he had voluntarily severed all ties of natural affection, leaving father, mother and home to take the monastic vows and devote himself to the service of God, and how, when this was done, he had gladly joined a band of earnest and devoted brethren who were sent from Rome to England to assist by their labours the completion and perfecting of one of the greatest abbeys ever founded in Britain. And then he recalled the almost passionate love of his work which had filled his brain and strengthened his hands when he first saw the splendid church and monastery, a vision of architectural magnificence and purity; lifting its towers heavenward in the midst of a landscape so peaceful and fair, so set about with noble trees and broad green fields and crystal streams that it seemed like an earthly realization of the dream of Paradise. And he had laboured so lovingly and patiently, and done so much to adorn and beautify the sacred shrine, that he had endeared himself greatly to the Abbot, who knew that in Anselmus he had a sculptor of rare genius—one who if he had chosen to follow a worldly career rather than embrace the religious life, would have made a name not easily forgotten. As it was, however, he seemed entirely content—he was as careful in his religious rule as in his art labours—and the wonderful chancel screen which

he, alone and unaided, had wrought out of the native stone of which the monastery itself was built, was not more perfect than the discipline and obedience to which he had submitted himself for many peaceful years. Then—all suddenly—the great test presented itself—the fiery trial from which he did not come out unscathed. And thus it happened :—

Among his many duties he was sent out from the monastery twice every week among the scattered villages lying about the church lands to inquire into the needs of the sick and the poor—and on one of these occasions he met the fate that befalls all men sooner or later—love. A mere glance, a touch of hands—and the whole bulwark of a life can be swept away by the storm of a sudden irresistible passion—and so, unhappily, it chanced to the monk Anselmus. And yet it was only a very loving, foolish, trusting little maid, who had in all ignorance and innocence beguiled him from his monastic vows—a little peasant, with cheeks like the wild rose and eyes blue as the summer sea, whom he had found tending unaided upon an aged and sick woman, her grandmother, working for her uncomplainingly, and keeping the poor cottage in which they lived clean and sweet as a lady's bower, though there was hardly any food to share between them. Touched to the heart by the sight of so young and fair a creature bearing her daily

lot of hard privation with such gentle patience and content, Anselmus brought much needed relief from the monastery—medicines and wine for the aged sufferer, and supplies of bread and new milk and eggs and fowls for the better help and sustenance of the girl, who, however, asked for no assistance, and could hardly be induced to accept it even from the bounty of Mother Church. And Anselmus saw her again and yet again—together they talked of many things, and often at the monk's request she would walk with him from her cottage door through the long deeply-shaded avenue of thickly-branched trees that led to the gates of the monastery—till at last—one fateful evening, when she had accompanied him thus and was about to turn back alone, his long-suppressed man's heart arose within him, and yielding to a reckless impulse, he caught her in his arms. Their lips met—and as he felt the tender, clinging warmth of that first kiss of love, he suddenly experienced a sense of happiness he had never yet kno n—an ecstasy so intense that it seemed to lift him to a heaven far beyond even that of which he had dreamed in long nightly vigils of prayer.

This was the beginning of many secret meetings—meetings fraught with fear and joy. He, the ascetic monk, scholar and rigid disciplinarian in all the duties of an exacting religious Order, became

an ardent, passionate and selfish lover—while she, poor child, overcome and carried away by the burning warmth of his eager caresses and words of endearment, asked nothing better than to be loved by him, and in return loved him herself with all the strength and devotion of her fond little heart and soul. Their dream-like idyll of forbidden love was brief; Anselmus, like the rest of his sex, soon tired of what he had too easily obtained, and in order to escape from the tender tie he had so willingly fastened upon himself, began, somewhat late in the day, to consider the dangers he ran by his unlawful conduct. His own safety and convenience now seemed to him of far greater importance than the peace or the happiness of the loving soul he had set himself to conquer and contaminate—and the more he dwelt upon his position the more irksome and unbearable it proved. One day, goaded beyond endurance by her gentle solicitude and wonderment at his altered manner, he harshly told her that they must meet no more.

"I have," he said, "committed an unpardonable sin in allowing myself to be entangled by your company—I must do penance for it with many years of fasting and of prayer. You tempted me!—it was not I!—*you*, with your appealing eyes and smile—*you* led me from the path of purity and honour—surely God knows it was more your fault

than mine! I am sorry for you, poor child!"—here his accents were softer and almost paternal—"Forgive me for any wrong I have done you, and forget me! You are young—you will be happy yet!"

And then, having spoken as he thought reasonably and sensibly, and being too hardened to realize that his words were as death-blows dealt brutally on the tender heart of the girl who loved him, he waited for tears, reproaches, the bitter abandonment of grief and despair. But she gave him no trouble or pain of this kind. All she did was to raise her pretty sea-blue eyes to his face with a look in them which he never forgot—a look of sorrow, pity and pardon—then she caught his hand, kissed it, and turned away.

"Stay! Are you going?" he called—"Without one word?"

She made no reply. On she went, steadily—a little figure, glimmering whitely through the shadows of the bending trees—and without giving him so much as a backward glance, she disappeared.

He never saw her again. But that same week, when he went on his usual rounds of charity through the district, he learned that she had been found drowned among the reeds of the slowly flowing river that wound its clear ribbon of liquid light through the monastery lands. And the old grand-

mother she had so loyally cared for, and to whom she was more than the sunshine itself, hearing she was dead, would not believe it, and sat chattering stupidly all day about the hour when she would return to prepare the food for supper—and even when the small frail corpse was brought into the cottage dripping with its weight of water and clinging weed, she would not look at it or accept it as the body of her grandchild, but merely said—"No, no! It is not she—God gave her to me and He is good!—He would not rob me of her in my age—He would remember how much I need her!"

And the monk Anselmus, proffering spiritual consolation, trembled within himself, knowing the guilt of his own conscience which branded him as the murderer of the dead girl. But he kept his secret and betrayed no sign of his inward torment. And so, like all things sad or pleasant, humorous or pathetic, the little tragedy of a lost life was soon forgotten. No one ever knew that the poor drowned child had had a lover—and certainly no one in their wildest conjectures would have suspected that a monk could be that lover—a monk of austere reputation, who was sometimes called by his brethren "our heavenly sculptor, Anselmus."

Years passed—and his sin had never found him out, save in secret hours when the remembrance of his little dead love's last look haunted him with

a kind of ghostly terror, and he could feel her last kiss upon his hand like a scorching coal of fire. Just in these latter days the thought of her had been so prominent in his brain as to leave him no peace. There was no especial reason why he should perpetually dwell upon the recollection of her sea-blue eyes and child's smile—yet somehow he could not shut her memory from his mind. And it was because of this constant remorseful impression and the knowledge of the irreparable wrong he had wrought upon her, that he had almost involuntarily told the Abbot that he was unworthy to perform the task for which he was commissioned, namely, to fill the last remaining empty niche in the chancel with the statue of an Angel. Burdened with the hidden weight of his sin, and feeling that even in his most rigorous fastings and penances he was nothing more than a hypocrite in the sight of the All-Knowing God, he wrestled with himself in prayer, and with tears, but all in vain. And even now, abased in supplication before the crucifix, he felt no answering thrill of hope or consolation, so that when he rose from his knees it was with a kind of desperate resignation to the inevitable—a resolve to do the work he was set to do, not with pride or gladness, but by way of punishment. In this spirit—so far removed from the joyous elation of an artist who knows that his hand can

accomplish what his brain conceives, he began his labours. Carefully taking the exact measurement of the niche to be filled, he made a similarly-sized one of rough wood and set it up in his own workshop or studio, so that he might study its height and breadth and try to realize within his mind the attitude and appearance the "Angel" should assume. Sitting opposite to it, and looking attentively at its interior vacancy, he saw that the figure would have to be life-size—and he presently began to draw on paper in charcoal the suggestion of a form and face, but without success or satisfaction in any actual conception.

"It is not for me to see divine things!" he said, bitterly—"Such inspiration as I once had is killed at its very source by sin! Shame on my weak soul that it should be trapped by a woman's eyes! If she had not looked at me—if her smile had not been so sweet!—if she had resisted my passion, she might have saved herself and me!"

So he argued—as Adam argued before him—"The woman tempted me." So will men, in their pitiless egotism, argue in their own defence till time shall be no more.

All that first afternoon of attempted "work" he sat, weary and puzzled, alternately gazing at the empty niche and at the paper on his drawing-board, where as yet he had only traced a few unmeaning

lines. The sun began to sink, and through the broad mullioned windows of his monastic studio he saw the western sky glowing like melted rubies in a belt of sapphire blue. The bright glow flared dazzlingly upon his eyes and made them ache—he covered them with one hand for a minute's space. Then, uncovering them again, he looked away from the sunset light towards the niche he had been studying all day, and—looking—uttered a smothered cry of mingled terror and rapture, and fell on his knees! For the niche was no longer empty—an Angel stood within it!—a Figure delicate, brilliant and surpassingly beautiful, with folded wings like rays of light on either side, and a Face fair, radiant and full of an exquisite tenderness such as is never seen on any features of mere mortality. Awed and overwhelmed beyond all power of speech, Anselmus, kneeling, gazed upward at the ravishing Vision which bent its star-like eyes upon him with a look of divine and affectionate compassion. The red glow of the sunset deepened, and within the studio all the lights of heaven seemed transfused, circling gloriously around the one white uplifted Wonder that shone forth from the niche like a lily illumined with some pale hidden fire—then almost mechanically—Anselmus groped for his pencil and his drawing-board, and trembling with fear, essayed to make a hasty similitude of

the gracious Loveliness which, like a beautiful dream, confronted him. But, gradually as the sunset-light faded into grey shadow, the vision faded also—and by the time darkness began to steal slowly over all visible things, it had vanished! In a kind of mingled ecstasy and anguish Anselmus rose slowly from his kneeling attitude—the Angelus was ringing—it was time for him to leave his work for the day and betake himself to prayer and vigil. Like a man too suddenly awakened from deep sleep he walked slowly, absorbed in thought, and the brethren who watched him enter his choir-stall to join them in the singing of the vespers, glanced at each other with meaning in their looks—one or two murmuring to each other—"Our Anselmus is at work! He has the air of one inspired by Heaven!"

The next morning dawned fair and bright, and as soon as the light had fully come Anselmus hastened to his studio. Full of an almost feverish haste and eagerness, he caught up the drawing he had attempted—the picture of the visionary Angel—but alas!—there was nothing suggestive enough for any attempt at further elaboration or completion, and he flung it aside with a sigh of bitter disappointment. The sun peeped sparkling through the windows, shooting rays of light along the stone floor—and Anselmus, seating himself in his accustomed working place, slowly and half-fearfully

raised his eyes toward the niche which on the previous night had held, as he now thought, a dream of his own brain—then—he caught his breath and remained still, not daring to move—for there again—there stood the Angel! In full daylight—and whiter than the whitest cloud tipped by the sun—there, with folded wings and divine, inscrutable smile it waited, as though it sought to be commanded—its delicate hands outstretched in an attitude of mingled protection and blessing! And now Anselmus did not kneel—for, more than ever convinced that this miraculous sight was the chimera of his own mind, he resolved to turn it to use.

"It is my own creation!" he said—"A vision evoked from my own thoughts, and from my desire to fulfil the task our father Abbot has set upon me. Let me therefore work while it is day——" And he did not finish the sentence: "For the night cometh when no man can work."

He began to draw—and everything came to him easily as in the former days of his early skill and power—with light and facile touch he soon completed a rough outline of the form and luminous drapery of his heavenly visitant—and then—then, when he attempted to get some idea of the divinely fair face and features his hand trembled—he looked again and again, and his heart suddenly failed him!

For surely he had seen those eyes before?—that wistful child's smile? Shuddering as with icy cold, he murmured:—

"God have mercy upon me! Spare me my brain, O Lord! Let me not go mad until my work is done! Is this Thy punishment?—and can the dead arise before Thy Judgment Day? It is not yet the time!—not yet!"

His eyes smarted with the pain of unshed tears as he lifted them to the Angel in the niche—a Vision silent as the light itself—but expressive of all sweetness—all patience. Seeing that it did not move, but remained quite still as though it were in very truth a model posed for his study and treatment, he fell to work again with a sort of passion that consumed his energies as though with a devouring fire.

Day after day he toiled unceasingly, giving himself scarcely any leisure for food or sleep, and for the first time in his life almost grudging the hours he was compelled to pass in the duties of his religious Order. Day after day, with miraculous fidelity, the Angel stood in the niche confronting him, and never stirred! Treating the vision as a delusion or imaginary creation of his own brain, he worked from it steadily—knowing that it was a perfect presentment of the ideal "Angel" he sought to create—and very soon after his drawings

were made he began to mould the figure in clay. Slowly, but surely, it grew up in his hands towards a beautiful completeness—and still the Angel stayed with him, apparently watching with steadfast, sweet eyes the modelling of its own likeness.

More than a month passed in this way, and the Angel in the niche became so much a part of the life and work of Anselmus that he could not imagine himself able to accomplish any good thing without the influence of its shining presence. The autumn deepened into winter—the withered leaves fell in rustling heaps on the gravel-paths and disfigured the smooth green grass-walks round the monastery, and bitter winds blew from the north-east, bringing sudden gusts of sleet and snow. The bare room or studio where Anselmus worked became very cold—sometimes he felt a chill as of death upon him while modelling the figure of his "Angel" in the damp clay. Yet from the niche where the heavenly Vision faithfully remained, streamed an unearthly light that was almost warmth, and Anselmus would have died rather than have left the spot for a better room in the monastery, which the Abbot had offered him in kindly solicitude for his health.

"We do not seek to know what you are doing"—he said—"nor would we look upon your work till you yourself summon us to see it finished. But you appear to suffer—you are worn to the merest

shadow of a man!—let me entreat you, my son, to take more care and rest—or cease work for a while——"

"No, no!" interrupted Anselmus, excitedly—"I cannot cease work, or I must cease to live! I am well—quite well! Have no trouble concerning me—let me finish my task—or else the Angel"—here he smiled a strange, bewildered smile—"Yes!—the Angel may leave me!"

The Abbot was puzzled by his manner, but forbore to press any further advice upon him; though both he and all the brethren of the Abbey noticed with deep and regretful concern that their "heavenly sculptor" seemed stricken with some strange mortal illness which, though he did not complain of any ailment, was visibly breaking him down.

Things went better for him, and he appeared to suffer less, when, having finished his model in the clay, he began to hew out his "Angel" in stone. He was an adept at this kind of hard work, and the physical exertion needed for it did him good and restored to him something of his old vigour and elasticity. From dawn to dusk every day he worked steadily and ardently—and from dawn to dusk every day the radiant Vision filled the niche and adorned it with rays of light more brilliant than the sun-beams. From dawn to dusk the sweet, mysterious

Angel-eyes watched him as he hammered and carved the rigid stone, forming it into an apparently pliable grace and beauty—till at last the day came when, having spent all his thought and energy on the last few fine perfecting touches—looking every moment at the delicate features, the eyes and divine smile of his visionary model, and making sure that he had rendered them as faithfully as only a great artist can, he realized that his task was done. Throwing down his tools, he fell on his knees, stretching out his hands in an agony of appeal. For there was now no longer any need to try and deceive himself—or to feign to his own accusing conscience that he had not recognized the face he had sculptured—the sweet lips he had so tenderly chiselled—the dimple in the soft cheek—the down-dropping eyelids—he knew it well!—it was the face of an Angel truly or the face of a Vision—but more than all it was the face of the little dead girl who had loved him and given him all her life.

"Angel of my soul!"—he murmured—"Angel of my dreams!—Spirit of my work!—Speak to me! Oh speak, and tell me why you are here!—why you have stayed so patiently and long!—you, who are the heavenly likeness of one whom I wronged!—why have you come to me?"

There followed a moment's silence—a silence so tense and deep as to be fraught with ineffable

torment to the mind of the suffering man. Then—the answer came—in a voice sweeter than the sound of a crystal bell:—

"Because I love you!"

Thrilled by these words, and gazing upward, he met the sea-blue radiance of those angelic eyes in mingled fear and rapture.

"Because I love you!" repeated the Voice—"Because I have always loved you!"

He heard—incredulous.

"I am mad!—or dreaming!" he whispered, tremulously—"This Miracle speaks as She would have spoken!"

"Love is the only miracle!" went on the Voice—"It cannot die—it is immortal! Oh, my Beloved! Your sin before God was not the breaking of a religious vow but the breaking of a human heart—the ruin of a human life!—a heart that trusted you!—a life that gave itself to you!"

The unhappy monk wrung his hands in despair.

"Punish me!" he cried—"Wreak lightning vengeance now upon me, O Angel of the Most High! Slay me with one look of those sweet eyes, O spirit of my murdered love! Let me not live to lose the memory of this day!"

The figure of the Angel stirred—its folded wings quivered and began to expand slowly, like great fans of light on either side.

"Love has no vengeance in its hands!" said the Voice, in accents surpassingly tender—"All is pardoned, my Beloved!—all is finished save the story of our joy which no mortal shall ever know!—a joy beginning, but never ending! Out of my death I give you life—and for the wrong you wrought upon my soul, I bring you, in the Name of God, pardon and peace! Beloved, your work is done!"

And now the radiant Form rose slowly, like a fine mist coloured through by the rays of the sun—it floated out of the niche where it had stood so long and patiently—and soaring upward, upward—melted away on a flashing stream of light into vaporous air.

Late that evening, as Anselmus did not appear in his place at vespers, some of the brethren sought the Abbot's permission to go to his studio and see if anything ailed him. The Abbot himself readily accompanied them—and by the light of a pale moon they found their "heavenly sculptor" lying unconscious before the empty niche—while, standing on a rough pedestal was the completed statue of an angel, more angelic in form and feature than any they had ever yet seen. Full of wonder and compassion, they raised the sculptor's senseless body and bore him to his cell, where after some hours he revived sufficiently to recognize his surroundings and to express with pathetic humility his gratitude

for the Abbot's fatherly solicitude and the brethren's anxious care. He was too feeble and ill to suffer much converse, therefore they humoured him in his evident desire to be spared all praise for the noble work of art he had achieved. All he would say when the Abbot expressed his admiration and reverence for what he justly considered the most perfect statue of an angel that had ever adorned any church was—

"God made it—not I!"

And he lay quiet for many days, without the strength to move—till at last the hours wore peacefully on to the blessed time of Christ's Nativity. Anselmus, brooding on this, began to rouse himself from his painful torpor and feebleness—nothing should prevent him, he said, with gentle, smiling earnestness, from standing in the choir with his "Angel" on Christmas Day!

So, when the glorious morning came he went to Mass, supported by two of the brethren, one on each side to guide his faltering steps—and took his own place, his stall being immediately opposite the niche where his sculptured Angel was now set up in all its glory—a beauteous figure so instinct with genius as to be almost living, stretching out its hands in Peace and Blessing. White, worn and weary, Anselmus was the centre of sorrowful interest among all the brethren who looked upon him—

his thin, intellectual face and great burning eyes suggested some haunting tragedy in his brain—and they watched him in a kind of fear, feeling that he had about him the sense of something supernatural and strange.

The music surged around him, and the chanting voices of the monks made a deep, rhythmic wave of melody upon the air—the light through the stained-glass windows glittered and glowed, throwing long rays of purple and emerald, rose and blue across the steps of the altar, and Anselmus listened, looking at all things vaguely as one far off may look from some great height at the little plots of land and houses spread below—wondering within himself at the curious impression he had of unreality in all these sights and sounds, and more conscious of the statue of his Angel opposite to him than of anything else. The stately ritual went on till it reached the supreme moment of the oblation of the Host, when all were seated with heads bent in profound meditation and prayer. The bell rang, and the resonant voices of the brethren chanted solemnly—"Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus! Dominus Deus Sabaoth! Plein sunt cœli et terra gloria tua!"—when Anselmus, suddenly looking up, was struck across the eyes, as it were, by lightning. Thrilled by the shock, he sprang to his feet. There, on a shaft of dazzling luminance far brighter than

the day, and poised on radiant wings between him and the statue he had wrought, was the Angel of his vision!—the Angel with the face of the little maiden he had wronged—the Angel of his inspiration—the Angel of his finished work! Ah, what tenderness now in the sea-blue eyes!—what sweetness in the divine smile!—what heavenly welcome in the outstretched arms and beckoning white hands!

"Beloved!—Beloved!" he cried—then with a choking sound in his throat he staggered and fell forward. The chanting ceased—the Abbot at the altar paused, with the sacred chalice in his hand—the brethren gathered hastily round the prone figure in consternation and sorrow—but all was over. Anselmus was dead.

A cloud swept across the sun, and for a moment the chancel was darkened—then, while two of the monks knelt by the fallen man and gently covered his face, the Abbot, with tears rising thickly in his eyes, again lifted the Chalice. The sun came out anew, shining brilliantly through the chancel and lighting up the Angel-statue with a sudden whiteness as of snow—and with trembling voices the brethren resumed the interrupted service, making the arches of the noble Abbey resound and respond to a mystic Truth which the world is slow to recognize—

Benedictus qui venit in nomine Domini!

LOLITA

A LOVE EPISODE

"GLORY—honour—love of the old Home-land!" he said, pushing his hat from his brows, and gazing up into the deep turquoise blue of the tropical sky.

"Pooh!" exclaimed Lolita, and laughed. Her laugh was delicious—like that of a mirthful child, and her dark passionate eyes flashed light with the laughter.

"Pooh!" she repeated, snapping a couple of little white fingers in her companion's face—"I tell you, pooh! Poo-oo-ooh! Glory? *This* is glory, to be here together as we are to-day! Honour? I give it you!" and, leaning from the hammock in which she reclined, she flung an arm round his neck, pulled him close to her and kissed him. "That is honour!—yes! For I never kissed any man but you! Love of the Home-land? What is the Home-land? Is it not here, where we were born?—where the sun shines all day?—where the beautiful

flowers bloom and the palms grow, and where we are happy? Yet—you would go to fight for a country you never saw! Fie! And leave *me*!"

He looked at her with ardent, amorous tenderness. She was well worth looking at. Lovely, with the voluptuous full-bosomed loveliness of Southern latitudes, and thoroughly prodigal in the exercise of her charms, she was an unspoilt masterpiece of nature. Her eyes were magnificent—softly glowing and wild, under long silky lashes—and her hair, looped back in heavy, waving masses, was of a dense lustrous black, the beauty of its gloss and burnish being set off by the vivid scarlet flower thrust carelessly behind a small ear as white as pearl. Her face was a pure oval, of a complexion warm and bright as the hue of a ripening peach; and the smile which parted her full red lips showed the prettiest little teeth like the tiny shells that gleam on the shores of a tropic ocean. And with all her physical attractions there was something still more alluring in her mentality—she seemed to exhale beauty and strength together.

"Lolita, Lolita!" he murmured, passionately—"How you tease and torture me! You know—you *must* know—what it will be for me to leave you! It will be worse than death!—for I love you!—ah, how I love you!"—and rising from his chair, he bent over her in the hammock and twined his

arms about her—" I want to be always with you—Lolita ! "

" Good boy ! " she smiled, lazily—" That is how you should behave !—that is how you look your best, with your eyes very blue and greedy ! They are English eyes—rather cold !—but your lips are warm—they want another kiss ! Ah, how good it is to be alive ! And you want to die ! "

He lifted her from her reclining position and held her against his heart.

" I do *not* want to die ! " he said, half angrily—" How could I ? Life holds everything good and beautiful for me ! But see, Lolita—my father is an Englishman——"

" Do I not know it ? " she laughed again—" Very stiff and very proper !—so afraid of himself sometimes, like so many Britishers who are over anxious to be considered respectable ! But they are not more respectable than other people, for all that ! Your dear good Papa was a *real* man when he married your lovely Spanish mother." She threw her head back against his breast and gazed up at him with languishing sweet eyes. " He felt then what it was to love !—yes ! not just to consider whether it would be ' respectable ' to get married. He loved !—he loved—! the day was all gold !—the night all silver !—the flowers spoke—the trees danced—the world was fairyland—he loved ! And

you—Antonino! you love! you love *me*—and I—I love *you!*"

Oh, she was a dangerous siren! Anthony Graeme, the only and much-idolized son of one of the wealthiest British settlers in the Argentine, felt himself rapidly drifting away on a flood of passion to a land of dreams! Was there ever such a honey-voiced enchantress?—such a warm, glorious armful of pure womanhood fresh from God and Nature as Lolita?—this Spanish maiden, daughter of a proud race that traced their descent back to the days of Cortes and his conquering crew? The Graemes, though they could claim historical Scottish ancestors, were nothing compared to the lineage Lolita claimed from "grandees of Spain"—and though she would give herself up to the pleasures of life and love with a joyous *abandon* which had nothing of the "fast" or vulgar in it, she was prouder than any empress of her exclusive and stately heritage of "the blue blood of Castile" as she would say, with a bewitching uplift of her chin and a flash of her dark eyes. Anthony Graeme and she had taken but a few moments to fall desperately in love—in a week they became engaged, with the consent of their respective families, and "the course of true love" for them ran smoothly, under the splendour and fervour of that southern sun which kindles the flame of life in human hearts as in the songs of

birds and the blossoming of flowers. But now a shadow had fallen on the brightness—the shadow of the world's Most Wicked War.

And Anthony Graeme felt the deepening of the shadow—the darkness of unexpressed and inexpressible evil creeping over the land he had been taught from childhood to love and to revere—England. England!—in which musical name one grasps all Britain!—the land from whence his father came and of which he ever spoke with love and longing.

"If I were not too old"—he had said one day when he first heard of "Kitchener's Army"—"I would give up all I possess to fight for the old country!"

"Would you give *me*?" his only son then asked him.

His eyes rested on the lithe, gracious form of the lad—the handsome face, the expression of hopeful and happy youth, and a slight tremor passed over him, but he replied:—

"Yes—I would give *you*!"

"Then you shall!" said Anthony—"I'll go!"

The father started up.

"No, Anthony!—you are too quick—too impulsive—you have Lolita to think of——"

"I will not marry Lolita till I come back"—declared Anthony resolutely—"She shall be free

to choose another man if she likes—though I know she will not! But I'll go! And I'll tell her I'm going."

Nothing would alter his determination—and he had told Lolita—but she would not hear of it—would not believe him.

"Why should you go?" she asked, plaintively—"There are plenty of other men! You are not compelled!"

"No—that is just why!" he answered—"you sweet Lolita!—don't you see that I *must* make some voluntary sacrifice, or what is the good of service? I shall give up all I hold dearest—you, my father, mother, home!"—and his young voice trembled—"I shall give up more perhaps than many men—but Lolita! My conscience tells me it is the duty of every man to go."

She was silent, playing with the flower she had put in his buttonhole. After a pause she said:—

"Duty is an ugly word, and it means different things in different countries. No!—I will not let you frown at me! Long ago in Old Spain it was Torquemada's 'duty' to put his fellow-creatures on the rack and twist their limbs off! In Old Mexico it was the people's 'duty' to dash out other people's brains and burn their bodies on altars to their dreadful gods. Among certain savage tribes, it is a 'duty' to eat one's grandparents! What

would you? Now *you* say it is your 'duty' to fight for your father's country which you never saw, and which does not care about *you* in the very least!"

He smiled.

"Darling, it may be so!—but whether it cares or not, *I* care! I wish to prove myself the true son of a true Englishman!"

Lolita's eyes flashed.

"And as the true son of a true Englishman you choose to marry a Spanish girl!" she said—"Are you sure that will suit you?"

"Quite sure!" he replied, smiling, and kissing her as she sprang lightly out of the hammock and stood beside him in the spacious court of her father's beautiful villa, designed after the Spanish-Mauresque style, and surrounded by banks of flowers, cooled by a great central fountain in full play—"Very sure indeed that it will more than suit me—to marry the sweetest Spanish girl in the world!—when I return!"

She gazed at him wistfully.

"When you return!" she echoed, with a deep sigh—"Ah! you do not know your England!"

She went slowly and dispiritedly into the house—he followed—saddened, but none the less resolved.

Four months later he found himself where his "duty" called him,—in the "old country." Since

he had entered " into training "—he had scarcely seen the sun; rain and cloud, fog and damp had persistently done their best to depress his mentality. He longed, with an almost heartsick passion, for the brilliant light, the deep azure skies of the far South, and still more ardently did he long for a friend to whom he might sometimes unburden his soul. His fellow-officers were civil to him of course; but somewhat fond of—

> Gorgonizing him from head to foot
> With a stony British stare.

He was British himself on his father's side—but his mother's Spanish blood also ran warmly in his veins—moreover he was young and in love with one of the most fascinating maidens in the world, from whom he was now parted by immense distances of sea and land. Her face was ever before him—her dark luminous eyes flashed their tender appeal on him in his dreams—and though he saw many typically fair English girls, he found them colourless, cold, and without a touch of that indefinable physical grace which made the beauty of Lolita as exquisite as that of a rose swaying in the sunlight. And he often felt a great loneliness; though he fought against this desolate impression, combating it with a sense of pride that at any rate he was in the " Mother " country, and one of the self-sacrificing sons of " Britain Overseas " who had

come to defend her in her need. He was grateful too for numerous kindnesses shown him by pleasant Englishwomen, and though he did not care for the soot and smoke of London, his heart went out to the green loveliness of rural haunts and river nooks far from the great city, where peace seemed to sit smiling, regardless of war, and it was in such moments as these when his eyes rested on the fair smoothness of the fields and the pastoral landscape that he was glad to be a "Britisher."

"Yes"—he said, inwardly—"There's no doubt about it! It's a grand thing!—and I'll fight for England and die for it, if die I must! It's better than living for any other country!"

And he was glad, when—his training finished—he got his chance, and was ordered to the front. In the very first attack in which he was engaged against the foe, he distinguished himself by an act of brilliant courage, and was called by his Colonel to receive a word of praise. The unexpected kindness confused him,—he sought no distinction—no honour—and his courage was merely the result of never imagining himself to be courageous. Nevertheless the little "uplift" of appreciation given by his superior officer spurred him on to fresh effort—and he soon became almost notorious among his men for the reckless dash and daring of many of his actions in the field. One day, however, there came

an end to his adventures and hopes as far as his fighting "for England" was concerned. Storming an enemy position and leading his comrades "over the top" there was a sudden roar as of splitting rocks in his ears, and with a last cry of "Forward!" he fell into abysmal darkness and silence—the darkness and silence of what seemed to be the very pit of death. How long he lay there he never knew,—but when again he awoke to dreamy consciousness, he found himself in a narrow white bed, one of many such beds ranged in orderly rows—and some one was bending over him—some one who asked him if he felt easier? He essayed to answer—to smile.

"I'm all right!" he murmured faintly—"I can't think what happened——"

"Don't worry!" said a gentle voice—"Try and keep quite quiet! You're much better—I'll send a sister to you."

He drew a long sigh and closed his eyes. The reality of his surroundings gradually began to steal in upon his consciousness—he was in hospital, evidently wounded, but how and where? He wondered vaguely—but was too exhausted to pursue the mental inquiry. His thoughts gathering clearness, reverted to the central star of his life, which had become eclipsed to sight and sense by the blackness of battle—and Lolita's face, fair and

sweet and provocative, shone upon him with that Southern brilliancy and charm which is all unknown to Northern climes. The vision was so entrancing that he kept his eyes fast closed—to open them would be to see the long ward of the hospital, the little beds, the sad array of wounded, and so be reminded of all he sought for the moment to forget. And presently he drifted away into a sound sleep—and when he awoke, it was night. The lights in the ward were turned low—and there was silence, broken only by a weary sigh or moan from some brave lad struggling against restlessness and pain.

A woman sat beside his bed—her figure indistinctly outlined, seemed young and graceful—she wore the nursing sister's white cap and apron; and on her breast was the Red Cross. Her hands were busy with some knitting, and it was on these hands that his gaze became fixed. Very pretty hands they were—very white and dainty. He moved restlessly—some bandages held him, as it were, imprisoned—he tried to turn his head on the pillow.

"You must not move"—said a quiet voice beside him—the sweet, low voice of the nursing sister—"You are badly wounded. Please keep as still as you can."

He strove to see her face, but it was averted and bent over her knitting—and the lamps in the ward were all turned very low.

Presently he essayed to speak:—

"What is wrong with me? Am I dying?"

"No!" the gentle voice answered him—"No—please God you will not die! You are doing very well. But—you have lost your right arm. Oh, don't mind it!"—this, as a faint exclamation of distress came from his lips—"You can do ever so many things with your left!"

A silence followed. His thoughts began to buzz in his head like bees, and swarmed round that honey-flower of the South, Lolita. She, so perfect and gracious in her loveliness, must never marry a disabled man! His eyes smarted with a weak sense of tears—his lips were dry. After a pause he asked:—

"May I have a drop of water? I am so sorry to trouble you!"

She rose, turning her back to him, and put aside her knitting. Then she came forward, carrying a feeding-cup full of lemon water, and passing her arm under his pillow, lifted his head, pillow and all, so that his lips might reach the cooling draught. He drank gratefully, and as he sank back again in his former recumbent position he suddenly opened his eyes wide, more conscious of actual sight than before. A thrill of wild, lightning-like ecstasy sent a shock of new life through him from head to foot.

"Lolita!" he cried out, in amazement—"Lolita!"

She kept her arm about him, and knelt by his bed, smiling.

"Hush!—hush!"—she said—"Naughty boy, to make such a noise! You will disturb the other patients! Yes—Lolita! Who else did you expect to see? You left me in Buenos Aires? Oh yes, dearest! You think so? Ah, so stupid are men! I came over to your 'Home-land' with you—only how should you know it? The captain of your ship is my father's friend—he took me with him, hidden away—he understood the heart of a Spanish girl!"

With a look beyond all words he moved his head to lay it more closely on her breast. She rocked him as though he were a child.

"La-la-la, Tonin!" she crooned—and her glorious dark eyes against the white frame of the hospital cap showed a bright sparkle of tears—"Lolita has been with you all the time! While you were trained to fight, I was trained to save! I would have sought you out in black London, for I felt you were lonely in your 'Home-land'—only I knew you would never have let me go on with my work. I came to France at the same time as you did—with an ambulance corps—and one of the sisters here in this field hospital heard my story and gave up her place to me. So here I am!—and here I stay!—till we go together!"

A great sigh broke from him.

"Oh, my Lolita!" he murmured—"My beautiful angel! What you have done for me!"

"For king and country!" she answered, kissing him—"For *my* king!—for nobody else's!—for *my* country, which is *your* life!—I have done and will do all that is possible for a woman! And you have given your 'Home-land' your right arm—you will give me your left one!"

The light of a youthful spirit of fun danced in her eyes, and he smiled—he felt almost strong and well.

"Lolita!" he murmured—"Lolita, you are a darling!—but you must not marry a disabled useless fellow like me. I cannot fight any more——"

"Oh, silly boy! Is that your only use?—to fight? So like a man! Can you not *love*?" she asked, bending the glamour of her sweet eyes upon him—"Will not the left arm embrace me quite easily?—as well as if it were the right?—Ah, you almost laugh! And must I not marry you?—Oh, Dios! But I *shall* marry you!—and as soon as you are strong enough there is a good little priest here who will finish the affair! Yes, indeed! And what a good thing your father has remained true to his long-ago Jacobite king, Prince Charlie! For so we are both Catholics—and there is no trouble! Do you see this?"

She pulled a chain from under her bodice and

showed a small silver figure of the Virgin attached to it.

"This is my little Mother!" she said—"I have talked to her often and told her she must look after you. And she has been a good little Mother—she has presented your best arm to 'King and Country'—so that they cannot ask any more from you—and she has given to me all the rest of yourself. That is kind of her and she is a good little Mother!" Here she kissed the image lightly, without any touch of irreverence, and was about to slip it back into its warm hiding place, when he said, softly:—

"Let me kiss it too!"

The loveliest rose blush flew over her soft cheeks, as she held it to his lips. Then, as she replaced it in her bosom, he whispered:—

"Darling!"

She smiled—"You are much better!" she declared—"You will soon be very well! But—you must sleep now. Hush-a-bye! To-morrow we will talk!"

She re-arranged his pillow, and as he pretended to obey her, and closed his eyes, she leaned back in her own chair and also feigned sleep. He could just see her in the dim light—the pure oval of her face—the glossy sheen of her hair under the nursing sister's cap—the long silky fringe of her dark lashes on the exquisite smoothness of her cheeks—

and his heart grew strong with its tenderness for her, as he thought how she had said not a word of the fatigues and terrors of her journey across the ocean to a strange land, which, for a girl who had never been out of the shelter of a safe and luxurious home, must have been indescribable.

"Yes—she is right!" he said within himself—"I have served my king and country as far as I may—the rest of my life belongs to love and Lolita!"

And a fortnight later he asked the "little priest" of whom Lolita had spoken and who had become her great friend, what he thought about it.

"My son," the good man replied, "You must not seek my opinion on what is called 'duty' in this wicked war. I cannot reconcile it with my conscience or my faith to say it is 'duty' for one man to slay his brother-man, even for what he considers the 'Right.' But you have done good service for your father's country, and you have done it voluntarily and bravely—*you* are the loser by it—and I hope the country may realize its gain! 'Duty' in my mind means love to God and one's neighbour—love especially, and the responsibilities which love enjoins. Love alone makes the world worth living in—and you, my son, being now rendered disabled and unfit for military service, may freely accept the privilege, not of killing, but creat-

ing! A beautiful, innocent life clings to yours for happiness and support—it is your 'duty' to make that life all that a dear sweet woman's life should be—is it not so?" and the old priest smiled benevolently—"Be at ease, my dear son!—you have, as the good English Tommy says, 'done your bit'—and you may rest quite satisfied for now that you are deprived of your useful right arm, your 'King and Country' do *not* want you!"

And so Lolita had her way and entered into her special type of "Home-land." She and Anthony Graeme were married in a little whitewashed barn which did service as a chapel for the hospital, and after the brief and simple ceremony which made them man and wife, they left the scene of battle and bloodshed, never to return either to France or to England again. Their experience had moved neither of them to wish to live in either country. As an honest fellow, Anthony Graeme did not know England well enough to entirely love it, and a certain vagueness and indifference in his father's people had left a chill restraint upon his mind which could not be effaced. Yet he admired, with all a son's affection, the pride with which his father would call the attention of friends and neighbours to "the loss of my son's arm at Cambrai"—but he himself felt no particular pleasure in the incident. He would far rather have had two arms wherewith

to embrace Lolita than one! And so would any man!

Under warm Southern skies once more, lit with the effulgence of an ever-golden and kindly sun, the wedded lovers were content to rejoice in life and the undisputed possession of each other—such possession being valued more dearly because for a while they both had felt the raven-like hovering of the shadow of death over the promise of their youth. And in the radiant days when Lolita clasped her first-born son in her arms, and felt the inexplicable tenderness of mother-love, she prayed—" O God, never, never let there be war again in this world! Never let mothers have to weep for slaughtered sons—or wives for husbands! Oh, let us all learn to love—not hate—each other!"

The old, rather tiresome story of the Spartan mother made no appeal to her. She plainly said that any woman giving a shield to her son and bidding him return "With it or upon it," was "worse than a savage beast!"

"Yes, indeed!" she declared—"Much worse! Fancy me saying such a thing to baby!"

And she dipped her pretty chin into "baby's" floss gold curls with a smile that sent all the light of heaven into her eyes.

And often, while the thunders of war rolled long and loud over Europe, they would talk of

the "Home-land" with anxious hope and pity.

"But the England you knew"—once said Anthony to his father—"was 'old' England—Victoria's England—an England of the past. It is not the same England now."

The father sighed.

"Maybe!" he answered—"I know everything is greatly changed—manners, customs, men and women. But I will keep 'old' England in my heart till I die! May God give her the victory!"

"Amen!" said his son, gently.

"Amen!" said Lolita.

THE TRENCH COMRADE

IT was a bitter night, moonless and frosty. Now and again a sharp east wind rushed fiercely along, bringing with it gusts of stinging sleet and hail. The men in the trenches moved closer together; some of them were trying to sleep—others had given up the effort, and, leaning against each other for warmth, were smoking as comfortably as they could under all the circumstances.

"There's plenty of water in this lovely 'ome sweet 'ome!" said one, with a laugh.

"Ah! Some of us might take a swim for a change!"

"D'ye know where yer feet are, Charlie?" growled another man.

"Rather! Gone to bed by themselves in a mud cradle!"

Laughter again. One would have thought it was great sport to be huddled in a sort of deep, extemporary grave where the living were entombed before the dead.

"Sing us a song, somebody!" suggested a third

man—" Jack! Where's the boy with the voice?"

"Here!"—and a head was pushed forward in answer to the call—"What shall I sing?"

"Anything ye like! It's Christmas time—how about 'When shepherds'? We're rather like them, keepin' watch by night—only we're all seated 'in' the ground—not 'on' it!"

"I don't feel like singing a Church hymn"—said Jack—"I'm not a Church man."

"Who said you was?" demanded the man who had been addressed as Charlie—"A fellow can sing hymns without church."

"Mebbe!" and an energetic puff of smoke came from the corner where Jack was more or less concealed in a waterproof blanket—"But I've seen more humbug in church than anywhere out of it, and hymns remind me of the humbug. And you can't stand it, you know!—not in such a place as this—the thought of it makes you sick somehow——"

"Even 'when shepherds'?" and muffled laughter came from all the men.

"Yes—even 'when shepherds.' But, I say!—don't you go and put it down that I don't *believe*!—or that I'm not a Christian. I believe so strong that I can't stand any sham about it."

"Oh, that's it, is it? You believe so strong?"

"Yes—I believe so strong!" And the speaker's

head was pushed forward a little more prominently; "I believe so strong that I wouldn't mind taking oath that angels are with us to-night—here in these muddy, wet trenches—just as they were with the shepherds on that first Christmas night you want me to sing about——"

"Well, if they're here, *they* don't sing!" said a big burly man, a corporal who had distinguished himself during the day by several acts of daring which he would have blushed to have had mentioned—"There's not much noise about peace and goodwill in these parts! I guess those angels have gone silent!"

"Only for a time"—protested Jack. "They will sing again!"

"You're a queer little chap!" and a man lighting his cigarette, shed a momentary flare from the match he struck over the face near him, showing it to be boyish and fair-complexioned—"You haven't long left Mammy's 'bedtime and say your prayers like a good boy'! Where was you born?"

"Near Quebec"—replied Jack—"But never mind about me—I'm nobody. You want a song—that's better than talk."

He loosened some of his wrappings to give his throat and mouth more freedom, and then in a singularly sweet tenor, carefully hushed to a soft-

ness calculated not to lure a wandering Boche from his lair, he sang :—

Up—rise and go !
Rise, and make you ready !
The Captain stands upon the height,
Cheering his warriors to the fight !
O Soldier true
He calls for you !
Up—rise and go !
Rise, and make you ready !

Up—rise and go !
Rise, and make you ready !
Put on full armour, take the sword,
Be swift in battle for the Lord !
O Soldier dear,
Thy Master's near !
Up,—rise and go !
Rise, and make you ready !

Up—rise and go !
Rise, and make you ready !
Angels shall guard you in the strife
And Death is but a name for Life !
O Soldier true,
Heav'n waits for you !
Up—rise and go,
Rise, and make you ready !

The voice ceased. There was a silence—and a kind of uneasy movement among the huddled men.

" That's a queer sort of song, Jack "—said one—" Where did you learn it ? "

"I made it"—replied Jack, enveloping himself in mufflers and silence.

"Tune and all?"

But there was no answer. Then some one began to hum in a gruff *sotto voce* :—

> I wish I was at home in my shanty dry
> With the red-gold maple leaves nodding at the sky—
> Red-gold maple leaves!
> Red-gold maple leaves,
> Red-gold maple leaves nodding at the sky!

"Oh, stop that row!" said a man—"It's no good singing about red-gold maple leaves at Christmas. Out in Canada you bet it's all white snowdrifts by this time."

"Better than rain in torrents"—growled another voice—"and a ditch full of water!"

Silence fell again. The men settled to a sort of slumber. Jack, who had sung the "queer sort of song" was, despite the miserable conditions by which he was surrounded, beginning to feel an almost pleasant sensation of sleep stealing over him, and stretching out his arms, threw aside, by his action, his blanket, which though supposed to be waterproof, was fairly well soaked by the rain. Some one immediately put it over him again, drawing it round him in a soothing and protective manner.

"Thanks!" murmured the lad, sleepily—"Very

kind!" And he was conscious that the blanket instead of being cold and clammy was quite warm and almost dry. This discovery roused him to friendly protest.

"Oh, I say!" he began—"You're giving me something of your own, whoever you are! Don't you deprive yourself—I'm all right—why bother about me?"

"I am your Comrade," said a low voice, infinitely gentle, "here to help you when I can."

Jack looked up—the night was dark, and he could only see a shadowy figure bending over him—he did not recognize the voice.

"Let me raise you a little," went on this "comrade"—"If you rest against my arm—so!—you will sleep more easily."

Again the lad tried to discern the features of the speaker, but could not; he fancied, in the drowsy stupor that was stealing over him, that he saw a strange light, like an aureole, round the figure.

"Very kind!" he murmured once more—"It reminds me—of home—when I was a kiddie. I often leaned my head on my mother's arm like this. But—*you* ought not to trouble about me!——"

"I am your Comrade"—repeated the gentle voice—"You will know me when you wake."

And so Jack slept, in wonderful comfort and

warmth, on the arm of his almost invisible supporter, and the night wore away among clouds that poured out rain fitfully, ceasing from time to time as dawn drew near. With the first pale glimmer of silvery grey that heralded the morning, a thick mist, rising, as it were, from the ground in masses of greenish smoke, began to roll and sweep towards the trench where the weary men were dozing in their cramped and drenched condition, and the patrol gave swift warning. Volumes of the deadly poison-gas let loose by the cowardly and inhuman foe came rushing onwards, and Jack, roused by the general stir and commotion, sprang to his feet. But scarcely had he stood upright, and before the choking fumes had time to reach him, what seemed to be a miracle happened—the death-dealing fog was swept suddenly backwards —back, and full on to the enemy lines hidden in distance—while immediately over the trench where the soldiers, Canadians all, were hurrying on their gas-masks, a stretch of clear blue sky opened like a lovely canopy in heaven! Sweet air, pure and fragrant as the breath of lilacs and hawthorn in spring, flowed in and around the trench; no touch of winter froze the marvellous softness of the Christmas morning!

The men dropped their masks to inhale the delicious, life-giving atmosphere, staring about them

in amazement—then, with one instinct, their wondering glances became centred on Jack, who stood erect, his fair, boyish features turned to the dawning light, and his hand extended in such a manner as to suggest that it held another hand in its clasp. All suddenly as they looked, they saw distinctly and close beside the lad in the widening clearness of the coming day a shadowy Figure —tall, majestic and beautiful, which seemed, while they watched it, to emit a mysterious radiance from its cloudy outline like the glow of the rising sun. Awed and afraid, they dared not call to Jack—but he himself, ceasing to look at the waves of poison-vapour so steadily and surely retreating to work their foul errand on the originators of their existence, and conscious that his friend of the night still stood beside him, turned eagerly towards that Presence.

"Comrade——" he began.

Then . . . he saw!

Saw—and fell on his knees! That glorious Angel-Shape, clothed in white armour glistening like moonbeams on the sea!—those wing-like shafts of light that shot upwards into heaven!—that face divine!—those searching eyes full of so deep a tenderness!—was this indeed his "comrade" of the past dark and dangerous hours? Speechless in adoration, he knelt—vaguely he thought it would

be well to die now!—now, with that God-like splendour so near to his own poor humanity!

O Soldier dear
Thy Master's here!
Up, rise and go,
Rise, and make you ready!

And he remained kneeling, his whole soul absorbed in worship—till with a smile in which ineffable love and pity for mankind seemed expressed, the Vision passed, and disappeared into the broad glitter of the morning. The dream had vanished—the spell was broken!

He sprang to his feet, alert—all his pulses beating with emotion—and at once his companions pressed up and gathered about him.

"Jack!" they whispered, almost simultaneously—"WHO was that with you?"

Never could the fabled Sir Galahad have worn a nobler, purer aspect than did this young Canadian soldier at that moment.

"You saw?" he asked.

They nodded a quick affirmative.

"He was with me all night"—went on the boy—"He covered me and I never felt the rain!—He made me rest upon His arm——"

He stopped—overwhelmed. Great tears were in his eyes. He went on, tremulously:—

"He said I would know Him when I woke . . .

but how could I—how dared I even *think* I knew! Boys, never forget!—we none of us know!"

One of the listening men spoke in a hushed voice. "It's Christmas morning, lad!" he said—"Mebbe we were all in a dream! But the gas——"

"Was driven back full on the Boches without a change of wind"—said another—"Put it how you like, *that* was a miracle!"

Jack stood entranced—the enraptured look of the "maiden knight" of God was on him still. With an effort he pulled himself together, and smiled cheerily upon his fellow-soldiers.

"Boys"—he said—"it's Christmas morning! At home in Canada our folk are singing their Christmas hymns. I wouldn't sing one last night—but I can now!"

Bareheaded, and lifting his eyes to the eastern sky where a wintry gleam of palest rose betokened the rising sun, he sang very softly—

> "When shepherds watch'd their flocks by night,
> All seated on the ground,
> The Angel of the Lord came down,
> And glory shone around!"

"Boys!" he said again—"That was true then! And it's true now!"

THE SIGNAL

TWO girls were walking on the smooth sun-lighted slope of an English down facing the Channel. They were a considerable distance apart; one, slim and tall, with a quick, restless step; the other, small in stature, looked almost a child with her little light figure and hair falling loose over her shoulders in an auburn shower. The tall girl held a handkerchief in her hand; the little one had a book, which she read as she walked. Now and again she raised her eyes from its pages and looked inquisitively at the tall figure going on in front of her, wondering what sort of a creature she was, as folks often wonder when they can only see the back of a stranger. There came a deep hollow in the down, and the small girl, descending it, was almost lost to sight; but the tall one, springing rapidly across it, reached the verge and suddenly paused. Some odd instinct—she knew not what—made the little one pause also and dive down under the shelving bend of the land, where she could see without being seen.

She became interested, for the tall girl, first looking round her as if to make sure there was no one near, raised the handkerchief she held high above her head, and waved it five times. A short interval followed. Then a man came leisurely climbing up across the downs from the seashore and joined the tall girl; they clasped hands, kissed, and turning, began to walk back to the place where the little watcher lay hidden. But on the edge of the dipping hollow they paused, talking in low tones.

"To-night," said the man, speaking with a strong German accent; "to-night you will place the signal."

"I will," replied the girl.

"That's my brave *liebchen!* As soon as we see it, our destroyers will approach—to the left, you say?"

"The town is to the left, and the deepest water," said the girl.

"Good! Set the signal just here. If we see no light we shall know that the people have been warned, and we shall not fire. Run no risks for yourself. When you have put the light in position go home quickly—sleep, and think of nothing, except me!"

Here he kissed her with a kind of amused condescension, and put an arm round her waist. Then they turned again and walked away together along

the down, quite unconscious of the hidden listener. She meanwhile had made up her mind. One sentence the man had said rang in her ears: "If we see no light, we shall know that the people have been warned, and we shall not fire." Full of hazy ideas, she ran home, but said nothing to anyone of her afternoon's adventure. As soon as it grew dark, she slipped secretly out of doors and ran to the downs. How fast her little feet flew! Breathless and giddy she ran on and on, lost to everything but the one idea in her mind, till at last she came to the spot where she had hidden herself a few hours before. There she lay down flat on the grass, panting like a frightened animal, and waited. All was wonderfully still. There was a pale, watery moon, and the slow wash of the sea sounded like the merest whisper, lapping the shore below.

Hush! A light footfall stirred the air. The girl watcher lifted herself very cautiously and peered round a hillock of grass. Yes. There was the tall, slim figure she expected to see, but now wrapped in a long cloak, and, walking stealthily, it came nearer, then stopped. The cloak was put back with one hand, showing the other hand holding a large lantern, lit, and burning with a vivid brightness. Slowly and carefully, without any hesitation, the girl who carried it set it down on the highest point of the grass, which rolled upwards

above the hollow of the land, and then walked away at a fairly rapid pace without looking back. Quickly as she moved, she went far too slowly for the impatience of the hidden witness of her action; never did she seem to pass quite out of sight, and all the time that her figure could be dimly discerned in the varying moonlight and shadow the lantern was burning like a red fire! At last, at last, she vanished. Hush! Was that the sound of a gun? Wild with her excitement and fear, the little unseen watcher sprang from her hiding-place, seized the lantern, broke open its glass with a stone, and extinguished the light. Then she rushed at a mad speed home, carrying it with her as proof of her story, which filled her parents with amazement and incredulity.

But that night four enemy destroyers and attendant aeroplanes waited in vain for the "signal" which had been promised to them—the signal to bombard an undefended little coast town and slay hundreds of its innocent sleeping inhabitants, and the lives that were so cruelly threatened by the treachery of one English girl were saved by the quick intelligence and courage of another. Not all English women are true to their country—would they were! But the faithful souls are in the majority.

THE MYSTIC TUNE

AN IDYLL OF THE HEBRIDES

THERE are certain parts of the Western Hebrides where one may walk for many miles without meeting a human being save, possibly, a solitary shepherd or belated fisherman tramping slowly homeward to some village hidden among the mist-crowned hills. It is easy to lose one's way, but more than difficult to find it, especially if, as is often the case, the eyes of the mind become bewildered by the weird and almost tragic beauty of the natural scenery. The very ability to think is, in a sense, hypnotized out of practical considerations into a passive state of dreamy sufferance. In such a condition one may wander far, almost unconscious of time or distance,—and so it chanced to me one late summer evening, when, after a day of persistent rain and drifting mist, the clouds suddenly cleared and the heavens seemed, as it were, torn open to display a wild glory of scarlet and gold flaring round the sinking sun. I found

myself on the slope of a hill crowned with heather, glowing rose-purple in all the light flung broadcast by the western clearing of the sky,—and, all suddenly, as I stood watching the vibrating splendour, I heard the distant sound of a violin. The plaintive wail of the strings shivered through the air like the cry of a bird wounded in its flight, and I listened with a sense of pain that was akin to fear. For there was no one in sight,—all the land lay bare and gleaming wet in the sunset glow,—and on the sea there loomed a darkness of angry shadows contesting with broken teeth of white foam; but there was not a boat returning from the herring fishing, and not a sign of any habitation from which the call of the quivering strings could come. Still listening intently, I heard the music take a richer form—a tune of exquisite sweetness and irresistible appeal unfolded itself on the air like the petals of a flower, and its beauty enthralled me. I could not stay there on the hill, and allow so divine and haunting a melody to escape me,—I resolved that I must follow it and find the player. With this impulse upon me, I ran down the hill, and still continued running for a time, the magic tune still sounding and going on before me as a guide, though I knew not, and thought not, as to where it might lead me. The sun was slowly sinking, and I felt that soon I might be more a lost wanderer than

before if darkness fell before I could discover any shelter,—but the Tune called me on, and its irresistible, melancholy sweetness filled my soul, leaving no room for prudence concerning my own personal guidance or safety. Breathless with running, I presently slackened my heedless pace through the wet heather which tangled itself about my feet, and contented myself with a steady rapidity of walking, which brought me to a narrow path winding across a moor. Here the Tune seemed to grow louder and more persistent, and though I now began to think it was a fantastic illusion of sound in my own imagination I still went on, impelled almost unconsciously. All at once I perceived a small dull light twinkling microscopically among the gathering evening shadows—and making my way towards it, I came close upon a crofter's cottage, set by itself as it were, in a wilderness,—the twinkling light gleaming like an eye from one opening of either a window or a door. As I quickened my steps and drew nearer, the Tune came out, as it seemed, to meet me —it stretched its beautiful arms of melody forth to embrace and draw me to itself—and in the dying flares of the sunset I found I had reached my goal.

The figure of a man, dimly silhouetted against the wall of the cottage, gradually took shape,—a man, playing a violin of exquisite tone and power—such

an instrument as any connoisseur would at once have envied. I checked myself in my hurried walk —and only ventured on, step by step, till I came within a few feet of the mysterious player who continued playing the same mysterious tune. There was still enough light in the sunset sky for us to see each other, and as I approached he looked at me without any apparent surprise or curiosity, drawing his bow across the strings with steady tenderness and purity. He had not the appearance of a native of the country—he wore the clothes of a man accustomed to cities and social observances, and his slim well-poised figure gave an impression of athletic force and symmetry. I longed to speak, —to ask if I might take shelter in the cottage, or haply find a guide to show me the way back to the village my walk had left so far behind me, but I dared not break the flowing of the Tune! All at once, a voice, low and penetrating, spoke to me across the swaying melody—

"When she is asleep I will come to you."

I could not understand this—but was content to wait, and gradually my eyes, becoming accustomed to the shadows gathered round and about the cottage, were able to see a little through the open door. There, by the glimmering embers of a peat fire, sat a woman, deeply sunk in an armchair, her feet supported on a wooden stool, and her hands, moving

up and down rhythmically, were beating mechanical time to the Tune. I could not discern her features, but she seemed old and feeble, and the hands that never ceased their swaying motion were ghostly thin and spectral. I drew a few steps nearer the door and looked in more closely. There was something desolate and unearthly about that huddled figure—an embodied hopelessness, a helpless pitifulness, that chilled my blood and filled me with awe as well as compassion—surely, thought I, here was a human wreck cast aside and left to be broken up by the tide of cruel circumstance and yet—the Tune! Like a living thing of tenderest sympathy it caressed all the air round that lonely and aged creature, giving light as it were to the deepening darkness, and speaking in soft accents of wordless rhythm which suggested a speech higher than human; and while I waited, leaning against the open door and listening, a long shivering sigh came breathing out on the air, and a faint wailing voice murmured—

"He does not sing it as he used to sing! There is something gone—gone—gone!"

The spectral old hands waved beseechingly and then fell inert. The Tune, hovering in the evening mists like a winged creature, paused, and seemed to tremble—then went on softly, and yet more softly, while the player moved out of the shadows and,

still playing, came to the door of the cottage and looked in. Watchfully he studied the huddled figure in the chair, drawing the bow delicately across the strings of his violin, till the weary head fell back—then, with another long sigh of exhaustion, all movement ceased in a sleep that resembled more of a swoon than slumber. The player ceased,—and the sudden silence in the darkening evening created a sense of such weird emptiness and desolation that it was almost unbearable. My eyes filled with tears—and I hesitated to speak. The man with the violin addressed me.

"You have missed your way?" he asked, gently—"I am sorry to have been so long without speaking to you, but I could not interrupt the tune till she slept."

He waited,—but still I could say nothing. He flicked a string or two of the violin with one finger half mechanically, and presently went on—

"She lost her grandson in the war,—he was a friend of mine. And he was all she had—a bright, handsome lad of great musical genius. The tune I played was his favourite tune,—it is a very old Gaelic melody. He used to whistle it, and above all, to sing it in a voice that would have made his fortune, had he ever had the chance. He went out to Flanders as a gunner, and the very first day he took the field he was killed—just blown to bits like a

handful of paper. She could never understand it. She does not believe he is dead. Since the Armistice I have visited her regularly—she is all alone except for one woman of the moorlands who looks after her. All she cares for is the Tune. I play it for her whenever I can."

"And you—" I said at last—"you are no relation?"

"No. I am a violinist by profession—I play in Paris, London, Berlin—you may have heard my name."

He gave that name,—one of the greatest renown in the European musical world.

"Oh!" I exclaimed—"*You* are that wonderful genius!—*you*—!"

He deprecated my enthusiasm by a slight wave of the hand.

"Not at all!" he said—"I am no genius, for I cannot even play the tune as *he* sang it!" He bent towards the sad and aged figure in the chair. "Yes, she is fast asleep now"—he continued—"And so she will forget,—for a time! I have a professional engagement in Glasgow, and as long as it lasts, I shall come and play to her in all my spare hours. It is the only thing I can do for *his* sake!"

He paused—then laid the violin down on a chair with the bow beside it. "Let me show you the way

across the moor—you must have missed the direct path."

"I followed the Tune!" I said—"It seemed to pull me towards it!"

He smiled, gravely.

"Yes? I am not surprised. It is a wonderful tune. It had its birth in the past, among the Highland bards of old—and no doubt it is weighted with many memories. But this last one is as poignant as any,—glorious and hopeful youth struck down by the devilish wickedness of war, leaving helpless old age desolate and broken-hearted. The Governments of this world have much to answer for, —the Tune could tell them that its sorrow is only one of millions!"

We had walked away from the hut, and my companion put me on the straight road where I could see in the deepening shadows the twinkling lights of the little wayside hotel I had strayed from. I held out my hand, which he pressed warmly and kindly.

"When I hear you play again at Queen's Hall," I said—"I shall know your heart is even greater than your genius! I shall think of your goodness and sympathy for this poor, lonely old woman, and whatever you play, whether it be of Beethoven or any other great composer, I shall feel that the Tune is your real masterpiece!"

"The only masterpiece that is never mastered!" he replied, gently, with a smile—"For it has the soul of the dead in its melody—and however well I may try to play it, I fail!—for she will always say it is not as *he* sang it!"

"LEAD, KINDLY LIGHT"

THE Distinguished Scientist sat in his library alone. He was very dispirited and weary —the malady called "brain fag" had got hold of him. Nothing,—not even a great discovery, which he had reason to think would be the crowning triumph of his life, seemed of any good purpose.

"If it would make humanity happier"—he mused—"then I should be easier in mind. But will it?"

He pushed aside one or two of the day's newspapers, wherein certain "sensations" so-called had been started to give impetus to declining sales, —wearisome discussions on social subjects, kept up at the invitation of the various editors, by fatuous-minded persons whose chief delight was to see themselves in print. Their opinions were perfectly valueless to the world,—but no matter— they got into print. That was the great and only necessary thing. One of these newspaper "symposiums" had concerned the "conflict" between science and religion—and the Distinguished

Scientist had read as much as he could stand of the would-be learned twaddle which offered no elucidation of any difficulty and led nowhere.

"They will never understand!" he said, addressing himself to the blank silence of the room—"They will never have sufficient humility or unselfishness to learn that science *is* religion, and religion science. There can be no 'conflict' between two halves of Divine unity."

He turned over the pages of a volume near at hand, entitled "*The Science of Salvation*"—and read, as he had often read before, the following passage—"We know as little about ourselves at present as we do of the opposite side of the moon, which is always turned away from the earth. Thus, as it were, the face of one's own self is always turned away. No fact in mentality is more apparent than that within each human personality there are two forces, powers, states, or conditions. One seeks to rise higher towards perfection; the other, in the opposite way, toward a lower grade or state. One leads to all that can be sensed as happiness here in bodies, brains, and personalities on earth; and the other to an equal degree of unhappiness. One leads to mental pain, the other to mental happiness. And likewise physical. One must be saved from one's self. This is a literal fact as obscure and inexplicable as it may be. It is a fact as obdurate

and rigid as is the fact that gravitation causes bodies to fall to the ground. The subject is one of the most profound in the entire career of man. Writers have declared that we are precisely as Nature made us,—that we are living just as we are and as we ever have been—exactly according to our inherent natures. There is an opposite side to this tremendous question,—the view that an incredible amount of work has been left on our minds and hands. The legacy of labour resting upon man is to conquer himself and the entire earth. He is to annihilate war, alcohol, disease, poverty, crime, pain, insanity, idiocy, poisons, deadly serpents, deadly bacteria and insects and harmful plants and animals. He must save himself from sex-horrors, false relations, war and the greed of gold,—and that in a not far distant future—or—he must retrograde."

The Distinguished Scientist sighed and closed the book.

"True enough!" he said—"But truth is never accepted. If we present it to the people, we are scorned. But they will accept any lie!"

His sense of desolate "fag" increased. He thought of a trying experience he had gone through that afternoon when two American young men, representative "bounders" of New York State, had called upon him, ostensibly to pay their respects to a man of genius, but more obviously to assert

themselves, and to make a parlous exhibition of ignorance and impertinence combined, which would have goaded to fury any less composed individual than the Distinguished Scientist, who, after long experience, had arrived at the conclusion that "young" America generally was a condition of bacterial life in a state of fermentation and evolvement. Nevertheless their categorical inquiries and demands, not to say their comments on such information as he was able to give them, had decidedly bored and irritated him, and when he thought of them as specimens of modern humanity, he was not at all sure that he desired happiness for the race.

"Happiness should surely be for those who deserve it"—he thought—"There's an old West Country maxim which says 'If thee dussn't work thee shassn't eat,' and that applies all through. Man, as I have just read, has a legacy of labour resting upon him—he is to annihilate war, alcohol, disease, poverty, crime, pain, insanity, and all the evils flesh has brought upon itself—and supposing all done that *can* be done—what then? Will real 'happiness' be ours? Shall we be satisfied? Will those who 'feel immortal longings' in them find fruition for their desires? I wonder! For example—if I give this new discovery of mine to the world, war *will* be—*must* be—annihilated. But

will the greed and envy of men be likewise annihilated? *Only if he can be saved from himself!* No science—no 'ray'—no marvellous composition of elements can do that for him! Only the great uplifting of his whole mentality—the uplifting of love, humility, selflessness and sacrifice. But your modern man asks—What is the use of love, humility, selflessness or sacrifice? The best and kindest of natures are those that are the first to be betrayed—the most loving and loyal hearts are the first to be broken!"

A verse from a free translation of Omar Khayyám came into his mind—

> If I were God I would not wait the years
> To solve the mystery of human tears,
> And, unambiguous I would speak my will
> Nor hint it darkly to the dreaming seers.

He rose from his chair and went to a corner of the library, where stood a tall cabinet heavily clamped with iron. Opening it, he took out a small box, apparently made of steel, or of platinum, and set it on the table. Then, attaching a thin electric switch to it, he sat down again and waited. In about two or three minutes the room was suffused with a brilliant glow of crimson, which seemingly emanated from the box, though there was no indication of any outlet. Still he watched and waited,—the crimson effulgence wavered and swayed as

though moved by a wind, and presently formed itself into a long straight ray of intense brilliancy, stretching entirely across the room. The Distinguished Scientist took a long breath of satisfaction.

"Perfect!" he said—"So far as anything can be perfect! Now—if there is—if there should be anything in this atmosphere that is commonly invisible to human eyes, it should show up!—It should certainly show up—even if it were the road to happiness!"

As he spoke, he reeled back, dazzled and amazed—something there was indeed in the atmosphere not commonly visible to human eyes—not even to scientific eyes aided by scientific appliances,—another ray more brilliant than the first, but pure white and without a flicker, which slowly extended itself over the whole length of the red ray in the form of a Cross. Clear as a diamond, still as a pearl, it obliterated every other gleam of light save its own, and so remained. The scientist gazed and gazed—here was a thing beyond his comprehension,—moreover, a sense of sudden awe stole over his senses and held him in thrall. Slowly, very slowly, he attempted to move towards that mysterious pure Whiteness, but was held back by a force not his own. He caught at the table edge to support himself and involuntarily sank on his knees. The Great Light surrounded him in its pearly purity—and its form

as a Cross was clear—the head and summit pointing upwards and onwards. For many minutes it remained—then gradually began to fade—though not so much to fade as to vanish—and he was possessed by an eager desire to follow it wherever it went. He had completely forgotten his own " discovery "—in the box left neglected on the table, or else he would have seen that whatever properties of light or radio-activity or power it possessed, which he had considered " perfect " were, for the time at any rate, utterly extinguished. The wonderful White Ray was departing—he made haste to go in its track—it led him through the hall of his house to the door and out into the street, where crowds of people jostling one another on the pavements, murmuring noisily and pushing restlessly, swept to and fro under a driving shower of rain. And again he stood amazed, doubting the evidence of his own senses, for high above them all in its pure radiance stretched the White Ray, in its Cross-like form, stretching out, as it were, shining arms of light to embrace the whole dark world. And the Scientist lingered on his doorstep watching the dark, drifting crowd. " So blind they are "—he said to himself—" that they cannot see what is above them ! "

This thought seemed to strike his brain with a sharp pang,—was it not the solution of the " con-

flict" between Science and Religion? "So blind they are!" and if blind, who should lead them? And another hammer-stroke smote his mental consciousness,—a stroke of memory, which like a finger typing out a message produced the words—"In the daytime also He led them with a cloud, and all the night through with a light of fire!"

A light of fire! There it was—most surely!—those wide embracing beams of splendour extended over the restless multitude! But—"so blind they could not see"! And was he, the Scientist, clearer of vision than they? He dared not assert it. His great "discovery" was after all, only one of a million more waiting to be discovered—and as to whether it would add to human happiness, why that was not in his province to determine—that was the business of a Higher Force than any that could be probed or tested by science. So far in his knowledge he was as blind as the blind crowd moving under the stretched out white Radiance which emanated from nothing that could be scientifically explained, and which seemed to all those moving beneath it, invisible! Then—all at once—clear above the murmuring city noises, came the voice of a street singer, ringing sweetly on the rain-swept air,—a voice full of the rich strange pathos born of long suffering,—and the words she sang smote the ears of the Scientist distinctly where he stood—

Lead, kindly Light, amid the encircling gloom,
Lead thou me on;
The night is dark, and I am far from home,
Lead thou me on;
Keep thou my feet—I do not ask to see
The distant scene: one step enough for me.

The Scientist stepped softly within his own house and closed the door. Returning to his library he found it dark,—whatever his "great discovery" was, there was no hint of it—no gleam of "radio-activity" anywhere, not even from the mysterious box he had set so carefully on his table. He groped for the electric light and turned it on—then looked in a dazed way round the room—all was as he had left it. Was his strange experience a dream? A warning?—or a lesson?

"We go too far!" he said, aloud—"We seek to know too much, and in the arrogance of our knowledge we lose the great Ideal! And so we miss the way to happiness both for ourselves and others. We must learn to be wise in time—lest we destroy the whole fabric of our hopes and all the beauty of belief. Science is Religion,—but we may not forget that Religion is Science! One step at a time!—for the night is dark!"

Involuntarily he closed his eyes.

"One step!" he repeated—"With faith and guidance—but not with pride!—not with arrogance! Lead, kindly Light!—One step enough for me!"

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